

## *Dedication*

*Janet, Katie and Joe*

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MIKE ROBERTS



# Two Deaths at Amphipolis

Cleon VS Brasidas  
in the Peloponnesian War

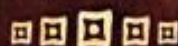


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## Introduction

At the end of September, on a road that passes a tarpaulin-covered Byzantine tower, it is not too demanding a climb to reach the remnants of walls adjacent to the Thracian gate of ancient Amphipolis. From these ruins, a little further up the hill, the town museum is revealed on the right.

Once past this small repository of finds, from Neolithic to Byzantine times, a track leads a few hundred metres on to the highest standing excavations. A young woman guarding the entrance kiosk (little used at this time of year) warned the visitors, in the friendliest of ways, to watch out for poisonous snakes. None were come across, but breathless tourists did benefit from a fine view across to the west, while a bit further up, after a scramble through a small wood and some ploughed fields, it was possible to see down to the valley to the east of the town and, also, the river winding to the coast, where the ancient port of Eion would have stood out on a low hill at the mouth of the Strymon. Much of the fenced-off site is of Byzantine origin, including mosaics and a Basilica, yet the earlier Roman foundations are apparent. The walls, the playing-card-shaped site and square towers together show the imprint of a permanent Roman military camp built up in stone. This is a familiar form, and seen throughout many parts of Europe and the Mediterranean whether in Caerleon in green south Wales or Saalburg, a part of the Limes Germanicus on the Taunus ridge in Hesse, Germany; or suggestive of the siege camps in the deserts outside Masada.

In Roman times, Amphipolis was an important way station on the *Via Egnatia*, the great road from the port of Dyrrachium on the Adriatic that led all the way to the crossing to Asia. Only thirty or so miles beyond the town, east along the coast, is to be found the pretty white-walled town of Kavala. Called Neapolis in the first century, it played its part in the Roman era, particularly when acting as supply base for Brutus and Cassius as they waited to defend Philippi against the armies being led against them by Mark Antony and Caesar Augustus in 42 BC. Not only was the area key in the birth pangs of the Roman Imperial age, but it also featured in a much later conflict. In 1912 AD, Greek soldiers, mobilised in a Balkan war, were tasked to dig drainage works by the Strymon river, during which they discovered parts of a lion monument. This has subsequently become the iconic physical signature of the town. It was possibly part of a

mausoleum built for Laomedon, an officer from Mytilene on Lesbos, who was significant in the era of Alexander's Successors as governor of Syria. While visiting the town the author had a conversation with a young man in full bicycling paraphernalia, who was working on contract for the museum. He was very helpful in providing information about recent excavations, not far from the museum, of some marble blocks. These were very like those found by the lion monument, suggesting that this site might have been the origin of the mausoleum that the statue had topped off; though the completion of the uncovering of a magnificent tomb at the Kasta mound, over the last few years, might suggest a rethink is necessary on who might have been buried there.

The lion now guards the bridge over the Strymon, where, on the other side, the town rises to 400 feet above the bend of the river that loops round the eminence containing it on three sides, acting like a moat for the western half of the city, and perhaps giving it its name. Amphipolis was built to command the east bank, and it attracted many a power in the ancient world, all wanting control of a river valley that gave access to a region rich in precious minerals, corn, timber and even protein-loaded eel fisheries (a favourite of the locals by Lake Cercinitis was eels wrapped in beet).<sup>1</sup> Moreover, whoever held the place was well positioned to dominate the country around, and hold tight onto the roads and river routes that passed nearby, leading east to the Hellespont and north to the heartland of Thrace. Yet if the Roman, the post Alexandrine and even Balkan war histories are intriguing, it is an earlier narrative that unravelled near Amphipolis that this book is all about. It is a story that climaxed around a town newly born, and which had had a troubled gestation.

At least two unsuccessful attempts were made to found a colony on the site of Amphipolis before the Athenians finally batted onto the place. The first involved Histiaeus, the tyrant of Miletus, a great Greek city in Asia. Histiaeus accompanied other (ostensibly pro-Persian) Asian Greek chiefs when Darius, the Great King of Persia, invaded Europe on his way to Scythia in 513 BC. He was left behind with other dynasts, including Miltiades, the future victor (over the Persians) at Marathon, to guard the bridge over the Danube that was the invading army's only line of retreat. These men found themselves in a quandary; after weeks of waiting, not knowing what had happened to Darius and his army in the wild wastes of Scythia, they eventually heard from Scythian envoys claiming that the Persians had been



beaten in battle, and that the Greeks could regain their own independence by breaking the bridge and leaving the cornered invaders to be destroyed. It was in this circumstance that Histiaeus spoke up, persuading his colleagues to stay loyal to the Persians who he argued were the greatest guarantee of their own domestic security against always-troublesome hometown opposition. When the Great King learned of this, on his return he offered the tyrant any reward he might ask for. It turned out that Histiaeus coveted the Myrcinus region in the Strymon valley, which he had noticed as a fine site when he had passed by on the march through Thrace, and which he now wanted to settle as his personal fiefdom. The boon was granted but he did not enjoy his prize for long, for a Persian officer called Megabazus warned Darius how powerful this ambitious Greek might become once he gained access to the minerals, timber and human resources in the region. This man knew what he was talking about. He had been sent to the Strymon previously to subdue the local tribes, and had based himself at Eion to plan the campaign. However, the king had not lost all faith in Histiaeus, but to remove the worry of what he might get up to out on the frontier he bought the Milesian off with a non-optional appointment as valued counsellor at his court in Susa.

It turned out that Histiaeus resented his life at court as a bird in a gilded cage, and a famous story tells how he arranged for a message to be tattooed on a slave's head; his hair was grown to conceal it so that it could be later shaved to reveal it. The message was sent to encourage Aristagoras, who was his successor as tyrant of Miletus, as well as nephew and son-in-law, to raise a revolt in Ionia against the Persians. After the insurrection broke out, Histiaeus persuaded Darius to let him return to the area claiming his presence would pour oil on troubled waters. Unfortunately for this intriguer, the Milesians would not accept him back and he played little part in the conflict, only mentioned leading some privateers from Lesbos in the waters of the Hellespont, and he was eventually captured by Artaphernes, the local satrap, while raiding the mainland. This officer killed Histiaeus out of hand, afraid that if he did not then his prisoner would one day worm back into the Great King's good books. And he had reason, as Darius, despite his history of rank perfidy, still apparently regarded his dead servitor highly, insisting his head was found and preserved for proper burial.

To round things off, Aristagoras ended his days in Myrcinus after the Ionian revolt was crushed, and Miletus taken in a wave of

bloodshed, burning and devastation. After rejecting friends' suggestions that he flee to far off Sardinia, he holed up in his uncle's stronghold on the Strymon. This had been fortified and held even after its suzerain was reluctantly transported to the delights of Darius' court. But, far from this being a new start, once there he was killed by some Thracians in a squalid local melee, finally ending a family interest begun by his uncle.

From Herodotus, the great chronicler of the Greco Persian wars, we also learn about what happened in the Amphipolis region in the years when Darius' son, Xerxes, took over the mantle of Persian avenger, intent on punishing the mainland Greeks who had supported their Ionian cousins in revolt. The preparations for his invasion involved not only the digging of a canal across the neck of the Athos peninsula but the bridging, by the same corps of engineers, of the Strymon. This place where Amphipolis would be sited is mentioned as a stopping-off point for Xerxes' massive army on the way to Greece in 480 BC. On arrival, the king was informed that the place was called Ennea-Hodoi or 'nine ways', so he had eighteen locals (nine young men and nine maidens) buried alive as a sacrifice to mollify the river god at this key road junction and river crossing. The area turned out to be significant for the Persians not just on the way in but on the way out too, when the rump of the Persian army was in retreat back to Asia after the failure at Salamis. As Artabazus led a rearguard of over 40,000 men on the road east, he fell foul of Alexander I, the slippery king of Macedon. This man, who had played both sides against the middle when Xerxes was present, took advantage as the crippled army limped home. He raised his whole levy, and took a swipe that heaped even more pain on men he had so recently assured of his friendship. He attacked and killed a large proportion of the enemy combatants in a desperate battle near the Strymon. His victory not only advertised his independence but saw Macedonian power sweep east into the vacuum left by the departing Persians.

The fort at Eion at the Strymon mouth however remained in Persian hands, and there is a tradition that it was from there that Xerxes shipped out on his flight back to Asia. The credulous even disseminated the following tale of the event: Xerxes' ship was caught in a storm and the captain informed his passengers that the vessel could only be saved by lightening it, upon which many of Xerxes' courtiers voluntarily leaped to their death in the broiling waters to save their master.<sup>2</sup> But more certain than this is the involvement of

Bogas, a brave Persian officer in command at Eion who gained a reputation that long held his family in good stead at the Persian court despite his ultimate failure to defend the post. The denouement came about when Cimon, son of Miltiades, and commander of the Athenian fleet, arrived on a campaign to dig Persian remnants out of Europe. With the place about to fall, instead of departing under a truce that had been offered and saving his skin, Bogas bravely held out to the end, and, when provisions finally ran out, build a great pyre upon which he himself mounted with all his household, and, after cutting the throats of his wife, concubines, children and servants burned to death.

Athens' interest in this region had gone back a long way; even Pisistratus, the sixth-century tyrant, had had property on the Strymon, and wealth from there had part funded a return from exile for this yoyo dynast. The Athenians, looking for what pickings were on offer, had long seen the advantages of the 'nine ways' site on the Strymon, and it was not long before land-hungry men from the Attic city ascended the few miles of the river to put roots down. The first occasion was in 465 BC, and it is claimed that as many as 10,000 in all set out plots to build new lives in this resource-rich country. But this was no vacant lot, for the Edonians, a Thracian people, already lived there, and the region itself had prospered with the economic stimulation occasioned by the passing of tens of thousands of Persians. The failure to conciliate these locals finally meant the whole enterprise ended in disaster. The newcomers tried to expand north from Amphipolis but were ambushed and massacred by both displaced Edoni and other assembled Thracians stirred up by the Athenian intrusion into their bailiwick.

The loss of life doomed this first attempt, but in 437 BC the Athenians were back. A man named Hagnon headed the enterprise this time. He had already had a very significant career, not least commanding as a colleague of Pericles in the Samos war of the 440s. He would continue to be important throughout the period and beyond. He played a part in the ignition of the Peloponnesian conflict at Potidaea, was central in brokering the peace of Nicias in 421 BC, and was even involved as a constitutional commissioner in the extraordinary convulsions of the 400 oligarchs in 411 BC. This tradition of civic involvement was continued by a son, Theramenes, who was mixed up both in the establishment and the overthrow of these oligarchs, only to meet his own fate at the hands of an even

more unpleasant and gory junta, called 'the Thirty', a few years later. This Hagnon tried again in 437/436 BC, taking a multinational party of colonists north to Thrace, and founding a community on a piece of land enclosed on three sides by the arms of the Strymon. They had some fighting to do to expel the Edoni still living there but this time it stuck, and the town where this history will climax rose out of the river marshes.

It was not just the main town that had an extravagant back story. Down at the river mouth, the port of Eion had seen plenty of action too. Held by the Athenians since its capture by Cimon, it had been the base from which Hagnon had driven off the local incumbents, and soon a considerable port was established as the gateway to the south for the cornucopia of goodies the basin of the Strymon boasted. Little now remains to show for it, except a few Byzantine stones near wide beaches that are now hardly full outside weekends and the crazily busy tourist month from 22 July to 22 August

This new colony established by Hagnon was central in a Chalcidian-Thracian struggle which the Spartans initiated in 424 BC. This struggle saw the climactic act of this current work, when Brasidas the Spartan and Cleon the Athenian faced each other in battle in 422 BC. This was far from being the biggest encounter of the time but is extremely interesting nonetheless, showing how varied and convoluted military manoeuvring in this era could be, far more complex than just two lines of heavy infantry lining up to stab at each other. There is considerable debate about the sequence of events in this dramatic bloodletting of so long ago. Yet what is not contested is that a great historian had a walk-on part in a slightly earlier stage of the campaign. He was called Thucydides, and it was his failure at this place that resulted in exile from Athens, an enforced retirement that allowed him to get down and write his history of the war. There is no doubt his preference would have been to have remained a major player in the unfolding epic but instead he became its recorder.

It had made sense that, when elected general, Thucydides should be dispatched to command on this front. He had family connection in Thrace, suggested by his father's name, Olorus from a Thracian king, and the hint from this patronymic is that he was also kin to the great Miltiades who had married into a Thracian royal dynasty. What is also certain is that he benefited from these connections, for, as well as being a landowner in Attica, he owned gold mines on the coast of Thrace opposite the island of Thasos at a place called Scapte Hyle,

‘Dug Woodland’, and it was there that he retired to as a base to write his history of the war. One of the few things Thucydides directly tells us about himself refers to his appointment as general to go north in the year 424 BC, a circumstance which meant that it was to him that Eucles, commander at Amphipolis, sent when he was attacked by the Peloponnesians during that winter. The Athenian general was at Thasos island with a small fleet of 7 triremes, and though he tried to help, embarking his men and sailing as swiftly as he could to save the day, it was to no avail, and Thucydides’ arrival was too late. The key stronghold had fallen and all he could do was secure Eion at the mouth of the river. The Athenians, pretty unforgiving when thwarted in their expectations, searched round for someone to blame, and decided upon the commander who had failed. That it may not have been incompetence, cowardice or even treachery did not matter; he must still carry the can. The result was a twenty-year exile in which what many believe to be one of the greatest histories of all time was written. Thucydides, a man of action, was transmogrified into a world-beating historian, who, within his *magnum opus*, could plead the same case before the ages that failed to sway the Athenian Assembly. He aimed to ensure that posterity appreciated what a great commander the man who had defeated him was, and, more particularly, to say that Brasidas only gave such good terms of surrender for Amphipolis because of the threat of Thucydides’ own imminent arrival.

The Athenian people’s decision created the writing of a history that has reeked authority ever since. Its author was so contemporary, writing on the cusp of events; he knew much of what happened first hand, as an Athenian magistrate and commander, and would, no doubt, have personally remembered some of the debates he chronicles. It is remarkable that coming so early in the telling of history he seems so modern, ditching major genuflection in the direction of divine diktat, and ridding his work of many of his great predecessor Herodotus’ gods and omens. It is fair to say, though, that he certainly stood on the earlier man’s shoulders, even if he saw his own output as in a kind of competition with those works of the man from Halicarnassus which he assumes his own reader to have considerable knowledge of.

Standing in the middle between literature and science, Thucydides described what he considered to be the greatest conflict the world had known, even more important than the Persian wars which although involving greater numbers did not last anywhere near as long. His

advancing of the understanding of cause and effect, and attempts to produce a much more usable chronology, are impressive. He is scientific in his sifting of evidence, though it is generally people not papers he interrogates, although unlike Herodotus he seldom names them. Making a stab at systematic objectivity using a diagnostic approach, his analysis of data and championing of a unity of purpose are qualities much approved of by those who followed, such as Hieronymus of Cardia, the Oxyrhynchus historian, or Polybius.

Thucydides wanted to find out what made people tick, and to move from the particular to the universal, to discover what makes a demagogue, and what their impact might be. These were the kind of questions he tried to answer. Not really until Marx do we get another historical thinker pioneering the use of such new analytical tools.

Little is known about the early life of Thucydides. He was almost certainly an Athenian blue blood, no doubt attending schools and gymnasia to train mind and body. There is a claim he was a pupil of Antiphon of Rhamnus<sup>3</sup>, first of the 'Ten Attic orators', and one of the adept political manipulators behind the rise to power at Athens of the 400 oligarchs in 411 BC. This man's Loconophile inclinations would have been a good fit for the future historian just as it was for so many of his class. He may have been kin of the earlier Thucydides, who had opposed the more radical policies of Pericles until ostracised, and would have undoubtedly sympathised with many of the views of this spokesman of the old elite. He, himself, although unable to deny the advances made in the fortunes of Athens, was ambivalent about the development of popular democracy that had certainly coincided with, and perhaps been key to, them. He found some of the people who had come to the fore in these years distasteful. Pericles and the old aristocracy, being at the head of things, were acceptable but others, usually nouveau riche, he found much more difficult to stomach. We must always remember this kind of class and cultural bias is in the DNA of most ancient sources, and we are almost always hearing from money, and usually old money at that. From Thucydides with his gold mines to the horse-loving Athenian, Xenophon, and Polybius, an Achaean from the *strategos* class, was always synonymous with cash.

Plenty have been sniffy about the readability of Thucydides, yet, style aside, few criticise the content of his chronicle of two powers he sees as doomed to clash. This is despite the fact that being deeply involved with the events he records there is an inevitable element of self justification in his work. Also we know there are omissions. The

Megara decree and the radical reassessment of the Athenian League tribute in 424 BC either are little noticed or do not merit a mention at all. Still, his output seems of such quality as to be almost unchallengeable, but common sense, if nothing else, must make us ask questions. Also, other voices can be listened to. The writings of a first-century AD Greek biographer, a Sicilian from the same era plus others can be usefully mined, and through them we can hear from other near contemporaries. The likes of Ephorus of Cyme and Theopompus of Chios, whose original output has been largely lost, are noteworthy, and there is always different evidence, archaeological and epigraphical as well as historical, to allow at least some testing of an orthodox Thucydidean tradition.

This book aims to use the study of two lives as the vehicle for a narrative of the middle years of the Great Peloponnesian war. In this period, from the death of Pericles in 429 BC to the Peace of Nicias in 421 BC we will look in detail at the careers of the most significant characters on each of the two sides.

Brasidas the Spartan was involved in many of the most important military operations before heading north for a climactic campaign involving Macedonians, Thracians and Chalcidian Greeks as well as the forces of the two main contenders. Opposing him, on the Athenian side, was Cleon, the key hawk in the popular Assembly, who dominated his city's policy making. A crucial victory at Sphacteria had garnered him great kudos; much to the disgust of the old elite. This man, at the height of his influence, persuaded his fellow citizens to undertake a major effort to counter the impact that Brasidas was having in northern lands where timber, gold and control of the corn routes were crucially important. These two men, in a dramatic denouement, came to battle outside the Athenian colony of Amphipolis, and were both killed in the confrontation. This double passing was of much more than just normal interest. It can be argued that, by their leaving of the stage, less belligerent forces in both Athens and Sparta could come to a peaceful understanding, leading to a hiatus that, even if it did not last long, was significant. The outbreaks of fighting that came after were very different, both in terms of who was involved and where the main encounters took place.

The two protagonists, Brasidas and Cleon, are not just interesting because of their importance. Both seem curiously out of step with what is seen as typical of the people they sprang from. Comparing them to each other, they also present as very different, Brasidas is an

articulate popular Spartan whose military career has an almost Homeric gloss. He is also objectively a very different kind of non-stereotypical Spartan, personable and articulate, who is able to win friends as few of his kin can do, flexible and charismatic, unlike the rest of that solid and stolid people who themselves were so different from the fiery, excitable Athenians. Cleon is also pictured as a new kind of Athenian, one who led the people off the rails once the guiding hand of the great aristocratic director Pericles was removed. He was also different because of how much the man who described his career hated him. Most Athenians are seen pretty positively by Thucydides but Cleon is derided in a very personal way, as a mob leader and a civic danger. Nicias and others receive criticism but the detestation for Cleon is special; he is despised because he took power without the responsibility in a way claimed to be so different from that of his predecessor.

The stories of the two protagonists have frequently been overshadowed, as so often the spotlight of history has been directed either back to the high days of Pericles or on to the later awful drama of the Syracuse war. Yet apart from the intrinsic interest of these two individuals' lives there are also plenty of other fascinating and significant characters to be found keeping them company; for example: Demosthenes the Athenian general, Nicias the domestic rival of Cleon and Phormio one of Athens' greatest admirals, the Spartan king Archidamus for whom the first ten years of the war are usually named, and there is even a very strong possibility that the great philosopher Socrates was hefting a shield and wielding a spear in the heart of the fighting around Amphipolis. A middle-aged warrior doing his civic duty is evidenced by a snippet in Plato's *Apology*, putting a body on the line that if not arthritic certainly lacked the suppleness of youth, and showing the same military qualities of solidity and endurance that he had on other battlefields as far apart as Potidaea and Delium.

The countries traversed and peoples involved are diverse, ranging from the Greeks themselves, whether European or from the great metropolises of Asia like Miletus and Ephesus, to Thracians and Illyrians, the classic barbarian tribes, even to Macedonians who sat somewhere in between Hellenes and the unintelligible others going "Bar Bar". The man from Sparta, who we are considering in detail, began his career with a brief notice in Peloponnesian regional defence, a small beginning that led to involvement in some of the



major events of the war, until the climax in Thrace and the Chalcidice. His campaigns were only one part of a larger conflict but he dipped his toe in all over, from Corfu to Salamis, from Pylos to Potidaea. In his last great effort he even seems to be capable of military innovation, not a common quality amongst his peers, with his trek north as a fine example of the indirect approach, in contrast to the years of riving Attica that seemed so long the main plank of Peloponnesian strategy.

To know what Brasidas was really doing in his Chalcidian campaign is difficult. We are not at all sure if his intention was to replace Athens as the power in the region or if his mission was essentially one of destruction, to hurt the enemy in a very important place. Or was it even simpler? This man from a warrior people was eager to find somewhere to fight, and, with the Pylos prisoners making a direct attack on Athens problematical, when the call from Macedonia came he probably jumped at the chance. He could enter a region where he could test his prowess with people from Thrace and Macedonia who also saw manly status as being attained on the battlefield. Brasidas was admired by many in the ancient era even if his name hardly resonates in modern times. In Plato's 'Symposium' Alcibiades even mentions him in the same breath as Achilles, though it should be remembered he is reported as being roaring drunk so an element of exaggeration may be possible. His personality was frequently commented on, as one who could on one hand pull out a spear that had penetrated his shield, corselet and flesh, to dispatch an adversary but still having the empathy to understand the instincts for survival of a mouse that had just bitten him.<sup>4</sup> These attributes, so different from those found in compatriots whom most people considered cold and arrogant, are raised as an important reasons for his success.

The history of the era is not just military stuff but it is politics as well. We have a good deal of detail relating to Cleon's career, and not just from historians. There is a limelight shone by contemporary playwrights that tells us much about what is going on in Athenian society at this time. The differences in the two men's public trajectory mean they are nicely juxtaposed, with Brasidas being a military commander and Cleon being, essentially, a politician. Though clearly this does not tell the whole story, there is much that overlaps, as Brasidas' political talents, so un Spartan, are frequently noted, and Cleon's life was finally defined, first by triumph and then by disaster,

in battle. Though there is much known about these two, this work cannot and does not claim to be biography, for even with Thucydides there is just not the evidence to make that a possibility. The hints we get from other sources would not back up any such claim, for even though bits by Plutarch, Polyaeus, Athenaeus, Aristotle and others give us something of a feel for them they are not enough for a life. Brasidas' father Tellis is only known as one of the many Spartan oath takers for the peace of 421 BC, and Cleon's father Cleanetus was a big man in the leather business. But apart from this we know very little about their families or spouses or indeed their personal life at all. We cannot be absolutely sure that either had children who saw the light of day, though there is a strong suggestion that Cleon had a son-in-law called Thoudippus, and it is likely Brasidas married, as in Sparta a failure to attempt the key duty of producing the next warrior generation was usually commented on. Yet still these two we are considering are sufficiently knowable as individuals, and by looking through the lens of their lives we are able to give an interesting structure to a brief period of time that can seem asymmetrical despite the impressiveness of the source material.

The culmination of the story on offer includes the death of the two protagonists at Amphipolis, and, though the combat there is never going to get into a book on the decisive battles of the world, it is, nonetheless, interesting, with a unique drama of its own. Also the outcome would have major impact on the most important conflict in Ancient Greece after the Persian wars. It saw the end for two men who had been crucial in leading their cities in tribulation and triumph for a number of years in the great conflict which Thucydides exposed to later generations. Plenty of archaeology has gone on to flesh out the places they knew, lived in and marched through; indeed at Athens we can touch the ground where the Assembly met and Cleon addressed his fellow citizens. The battlefields upon which both men fought can be part of the normal itinerary of any tourist trip, and personally visiting the key places mentioned has been important for the author. Much that is in this book has, of course, been covered in other works, both of the academic and the more popular sort, but this specific story has not been written in English before, despite the long popularity of all things Spartan amongst both the general and the expert reader. Finally, as something of an apology it should be pointed out that footnotes may not be as full as some might like. This does not reflect any lack of background work done but is more to do with what I would want, stylistically, in a book like this. It is not an academic

work, it is nothing on any career path, and it has been created to give the author pleasure in writing it, and, hopefully, the reader similar pleasure in reading it.

## Chapter One

### Leagues Collide

The Greek world in the last third of the fifth century could be well described as bipolar anarchy in the terminology of international relations theory, a situation that had developed after the Persian epic of 480–479 BC. In the wake of Xerxes' repulse, a Hellenic league began an Aegean war of revenge against the people who had just trashed mainland Greece down to the Isthmus of Corinth. But, because this war was largely a naval affair, it was almost inevitable that a different member of the anti-Persian coalition would come to take the leading role, rather than the one who had commanded at the battle of Plataea. The city that did so, when compared with the regional giant that was Sparta, had been, up to that point, ostensibly, just one of a number of middling Greek powers. Rock and dust had been the making of Athens. The very unattractiveness of the place is claimed what made development possible. The people of Attica were sprung from the soil of a country that had not suffered the ravages of invaders, because the hordes that had descended out of the north, from legendary times, had never felt its field fair enough to entice them, or its wealth sufficient to tempt their cupidity. So, left in peace, Athens had grown. Villagers met to celebrate common gods, trade goods, and congratulate themselves on being aboriginals unlike so many other Hellenes, people who had arrived on their ancestral acres after folk wanderings out of northern lands. These Athenians met around a sanctified craggy rock, where a Mycenaean palace had once stood, and where the Parthenon still does, built to house the tutelary goddess Athena, as she enjoyed the view from 500 feet above the city. Synoecism (the amalgamation of villages into *poleis*, or city-states) was the beginning of community, a development common to many different societies over many parts of the world. While her farmers grew wheat and barley, and planted olives, her merchants had begun to trade far and wide from ports on the coast. In the sixth century, Athens' black earthenware products became famous, much to the chagrin of Corinthian dealers who had previously almost monopolised the trade. Then, in the generation when the sixth century turned into the fifth, changes occurred that turned this member of the pack into a world leader.

A not untypical sequence of monarchical, aristocratic and

tyrannical regimes had ended with a reorganisation of the Attic polity into a form of democracy. It had begun with Solon, a semi-legendary sage and poet claiming ancient royal lineage, who, at the beginning of the sixth century, though his impact is hugely argued over, seemed to have arranged some debt release for much of the non-aristocratic population, enabling the establishment of an economically-viable citizen body. On top of this, and almost a century on, a blue-blooded radical reordered the traditional social organisation into ten tribes, to facilitate the integration of all parts and peoples of Attica, and opened the assembly and the law courts to all citizens, of whatever economic stamp. Then this newfound polity, now the uncontested political centre of Attica, took a fateful decision to spend the windfall proceeds of a silver strike on building a brand-new navy. All this is well-trodden stuff, and no part of this work to reprise, but what was crucial was the placing of Athens to profit from the outcome of the invasion of Greece by the Great King of Persia. The story of Thermopylae, Artemisium, Salamis and Plataea was an epic for the whole of Greece, not just Athens, but for that city it was centrally significant. The Athenians twice found their homes reduced to ashes but this community that suffered so much, only a year after Xerxes left Greece, found herself at the head of a predominantly naval coalition driving the Persians back across the Aegean, freeing the Greek cities of Asia and creating a real potential for *thalassocracy*. Only Athens, with its fleet of sleek triremes, anchored at the port of Piraeus just an hour's walk from the Agora, had been so admirably positioned to take advantage of the opportunity.

The victory at Plataea in 479 BC was an apogee for many. But on exactly the same day, but hundreds of miles away, another battle was fought, at Mycale. This was to be the signpost on the road that the Attic people were going to follow. Her navy had furnished the core squadrons for the victory at Salamis, and now in the aftermath she was about to reap the benefit. Athens' success would be extraordinary. This place, hardly able, a century before, to compete for control of the island of Salamis with her neighbour Megara, and held in check by the miniature power of Aegina after the Persians departed, founded an empire quite unlike anything known amongst the Greeks before. Apart from the large island of Crete, the Aegean became, in a generation, almost an Athenian pond with colonists and garrisons spread far and wide, and the Great King of Persia's fleet barred from entry. Only a few places like Chios, Lesbos and Samos, all allied to Athens, still retained any kind of naval muscle at all.

It was a longer than ten-year war between the two battles at Mycale and at Eurymedon that saw the Persians completely driven out of the Aegean. The victories at Salamis and Plataea had been amazing, considering the huge forces with which Xerxes had overrun most of Greece and the number of Medising locals who had joined him. But if the young Spartan regent Pausanias had achieved great things winning a bloody fight in Boeotia to destroy the Persian army left under Mardonius to complete the conquest of the mainland, so too had the Spartan king, Leotychidas, heading a coalition force that crushed another Persian army and fleet under the slopes of Mount Mycale on the Ionian coast of Asia. This man's reputation was not flawless. He was tainted, alongside King Cleomenes, for bribing the Delphic oracle to get an adjudication that had caused his cousin to be removed from the throne over a parentage issue, and had got himself raised up into his place. His performance was not flawless either. Many had criticised him, in the run-up to the battle, for lying inactive with 110 warships off Delos while the Persian navy lay open to attack at Samos. Only when Xanthippus, Pericles' father and, like Aristides, just recalled from ostracism and exile in the city's time of greatest crisis, joined with the Athenian ships was the Spartan persuaded to move, happy at last that the newcomers had boosted his numbers to 250 warships. Together they took the offensive, and, if it is improbable that they knew of the victory at Plataea before they entered battle, they had definitely had the encouragement of the Ionians' envoys reporting that their men in the Persian forces were ready to change sides when the Greek fleet appeared. This advantage was amplified when the enemy sent off their Phoenician contingent, as the remainder of the army and navy took up a defensive posture on the mainland coast. These Persians were not in good condition generally; reports of subversion amongst their allies from Samos had caused them to disarm the soldiers from there, so it was finally an ill-prepared defence that received a head-on assault. It was led by the Athenians and others at the front, and then an outflanking move by the Peloponnesians through nearby high country. When many of the Persians' Ionian auxiliaries switched sides in mid battle, called on to join rather than fight their compatriots, victory was assured. The camp was stormed, the army dispersed and the Persian boats burned along the strand.

But after the victory the Spartan king showed timid, suggesting the Ionian Greeks' cities were indefensible in the long run, and that the people should evacuate the whole of Asia to settle in other parts of the

Greek world. The Athenians were having none of this and persuaded the allies to stay put and make a fight of it on a firm promise that they would defend their homes, an assurance made believable because many of the places in question could loosely trace their antecedents back to the Attic city. This firm resolve after Mycale saw both a second Ionian revolt against Persian rule and the adherence of these Anatolian Greeks to the counteroffensive proposed by the Athenians. The venture was soon underway and, with the Persians now on the defensive, the confederates swept north to cut the bridge that Xerxes had put over the Hellespont and so secure the straits to Europe against further attacks. On arrival, they found the structures demolished, and the great hawsers used to hold the pontoons together taken away to Sestos, on the European side of the Hellespont, where the Persians and their loyal allies were preparing to make a stand.

Exactly how bruised the Persian military was at this time is unclear. Herodotus tells us Artabazus had got back to Byzantium after Plataea without too much trouble, but another retreating army was claimed to have been lost to the treacherous assaults of their old ally the king of Macedon. Certainly they were not able to get off the back foot even when King Leotychidas took his Spartans home leaving the rest of the Greek army attacking Sestos. It was a long hard siege, taking in the whole of the winter as the defenders, running out of food, were reduced to boiling the thongs from their beds to eat, before finally agreeing to surrender. When the confederates entered they found the Persian garrison commander escaped, only to end captured and killed by local brigands near Aegospotami, while the local satrap Artayctes was taken and crucified to satisfy people from Elaeus, a place which that official had previously mercilessly plundered. After this, even the Athenians felt the need for rest and recuperation, returning home with the very cables the Persians had used to build their pontoon crossings to Europe.

That the Spartans had left the Sestos front is unsurprising as the government in the Eurotas valley had, from the start, been in two minds about going further than just kicking the Persians out of Greece. Yet still, in 478 BC the regent Pausanias was returned to command, first leading a coalition force against Cyprus, a raid as much as anything else, before turning to attack Byzantium. This place was taken, giving the allies control of both straits, and the doors to Europe were padlocked. On the surface, it looked like the people who had spearheaded the war at Thermopylae and Plataea had also been at the

forefront when these key prizes had been won. But these Spartans were cut from old cloth, and just could not make friends and influence people despite their success. Pausanias, while still in command, was caught in intrigue with local Persian bigwigs, looking to try and establish himself as some kind of regional warlord. But if this worried both the people back home and his allies then it was his handling of members of the coalition that really counted against him. The siege of Byzantium had been the last action of the Hellenic alliance, and Pausanias and Xanthippus had both been on the spot, but the former's treatment of his allies had become intolerable. There were stories of the Spartan having the rank and file beaten and the officers punished by standing for hours with an iron anchor on their shoulders. Pausanias' own men always got the best bedding and fodder, and were given first access to the springs, and when complaints were made he would not even hear them. He was making himself so unpopular with his grasping behaviour and heavy-handed discipline that allies from Samos and Chios even attacked the trireme he was on near Byzantium in autumn 478 BC, registering in a very personal way their rejection of Spartan leadership. It was not helped by him being dogged by allegations of impurity due to his accidental killing of a girl, while in Byzantium, who he had intended for his bed partner.

In fact, this unpopular man got pulled back home as the rumours of his intrigues circulated. Though eventually he was exonerated, Spartan control of the war effort slipped away. The allies had become thoroughly disgruntled with impossible Lacedaemons just when many of the administration in Sparta became happy to withdraw from the war. Still, it was a process not an event, and some in Sparta had not completely lost interest, sending out to the front an officer called Dorkis in spring 477 BC. But the allies were having none of it. They were completely disenchanted, and the Spartan ended slinking off home leaving the Athenians in charge by default. In fact this was not the last time the confederates saw Pausanias. After being acquitted back home, he returned in 477 BC to Byzantium. This man was unpleasant but determined, and he reappeared to try and carve out a fiefdom, before his abrasive personality encouraged enemies to lay the ultimate charge against him, that he was conspiring revolution with helots. The *ephors* ordered his arrest, but he was warned and managed to find sanctuary in a temple of Athena of the Brazen House. Once there, he was locked in and starved to death. The other Spartan principal fared little better either. King Leotychidas was caught a few years later with his sleeve filled with silver while campaigning in



Thessaly, bribed to go easy on his enemies. He was exiled and died in Tegea. None of this made the wise heads in Sparta less suspicious of their commanders interacting with the outside world, encouraging them to leave such stuff to the Athenians.

Much is unclear about what happened between Mycale and the establishment of the Delian League in 478 or 477 BC, but, with the Spartans gone, Aristides was the first man to take the lead: 'so that, before the Lacedaemonians were aware, not by means of hoplites or ships or horsemen, but by tact and diplomacy, he had stripped them of the leadership'.<sup>1</sup>

This participant in the battle of Plataea was known as 'the Just', and was notable as a domestic opponent of the arch opportunist Themistocles, and would soon have a key role in adjusting the tribute rates for the league the Athenians were constructing. Almost immediately, however, his military role was taken over by Cimon, himself a Salamis veteran, who would really make a mark in this anti-Persian war. He was the first great Athenian imperialist, who both trailed glory like a cloud and had the personal funds to keep himself highly popular amongst his compatriots. He was known for feeding hometown neighbours on a regular basis and spending money, won on campaigns, to build ramparts for the Acropolis and on foundation work for the long walls that would eventually attach Athens to its ports; and all this with little smell of corruption. He achieved much for a man who is not only claimed as a wine bibber but lazy to boot, and who retained a high reputation for patriotism despite a well-known love of all things Spartan.

The confederacy this crapulous man led included the islands of Samos, Chios and Lesbos as well as many of the cities on the Asian coast that had thrown off Persian tutelage in the second Ionian revolt. There had already been Asian Greeks at the siege of Byzantium in 478 BC, and more joined following the success of Cimon's arms and the visible waning of Persian influence in the Aegean. The exact numbers of the adherents who would soon make up the Delium League is unknown but there were at least 179, and more probably joined from the Black Sea coast to Italy as Cimon's continuing achievements kept adherence attractive. First taking his fleet from Byzantium to drive the enemy out of the Thracian littoral, it was no coincidence he involved himself in the region. His father was Miltiades, the hero of Marathon, who was an old Thracian hand himself, and had married a local king's daughter in his time, before Persia and the Greeks went to war.

Control of the mouth of the Strymon was duly achieved by winking the Persian garrison out of the fort at Eion.

After disposing of this determined remnant, Cimon, in 475 BC, led the allies against Scyros, an island east of Euboea, and an important staging post on the corn route to the Hellespont. This place was famous for the founder king of Athens, Theseus, whose carcass ended up there, and Cimon, after defeating the inhabitants and claiming some bones as his remains, settled the place with Athenian colonists on the grounds that the connection gave them a right despite the skeleton in question being swiftly repatriated to the mother city. The next years saw action against Carystus in the south of Euboea, which succumbed after a decent amount of fighting, while other places in Euboea that had also Medised were brought into the net. But, even in these halcyon early days, the confederation was not without its problems. The islanders on Naxos attempted to secede on one occasion, only to be brought back into line after a siege. This was perhaps inevitable with the war becoming much less like the one most places had signed on for, and the permanent nature of the tribute demanded became clearer. Even Aristides' even-handed accounting did not impress those who had seen the alliance as a temporary arrangement, with the ousting of barbarians, rather than Athenian aggrandisement, as its reason for being.

Cimon, though, was not going to falter because of these weak links, and he ended this stage of the war with a triumph almost equal to those won in 480 and 479 BC. It came about in response to the first real effort of the Persians to raise the stakes in the contest for Greek Asia. It was the early half of the 460s that saw them brewing trouble, as an army and fleet gathered together at the mouth of the Eurymedon river near Aspendos, with the intention of retaking what they might along the coast of Asia minor. But Cimon took pre-emptive action, leading 200 of his veteran triremes and a major league army down to Pharsalus in Pamphylia to face them. It turned out a two-pronged affair, a bit like Mycale, where the Persian fleet was defeated in the estuary mouth before being driven back to shore, when the Leaguers disembarked and destroyed the enemy in their camp. Like many events in this period the dating is clumsy, the year 469 BC is suggested by Plutarch, backed by an anecdote about the Archon Apsephion, dated to 469/468 BC, choosing Cimon and his fellow generals as judges in a competition because they had just achieved a great victory. Certainly, the triumph came after the trouble at Naxos

but before the people on Thasos contrived the second real test of the Athenian League's cohesion. While others claim it as late as 466 BC, what is not in dispute is that the result was to put the Persians out of their stride at least until 451 BC, allowing the League to recruit members as far down south as Caria and possibly even further.

Well over a decade of success had built an empire but the seeds of trouble were germinating. Naxos had exposed the issues, and now, on another island called Thasos, things erupted. Indeed it may have been troubles there that stopped Cimon from truly exploiting his triumph at Eurymedon. This people were deeply unhappy about the confederation they had joined so willingly to get out from under Persian rule, foreign occupation and future menace. This package had encouraged many to join but now, with demands for tribute becoming onerous, and the barbarian threat far off, local disputes with Athens over control of the markets on the coast of Thrace and the exploitation of local mines loomed more important than any urge to anti-Persian solidarity. The dispute ended in rebellion, and the Athenians responded, quickly sending a force to reduce the islanders. A battle was fought at sea, and, after a victory, the Athenians landed and put the town under siege. This lasted for nearly three years, most likely between 465–463 BC, before the defenders finally succumbed, agreeing to pay a fine, throw down their walls, hand over their warships, roll over on the economic issues and agree to pay tribute in the future. A worrying record was developing of the Athenians taking over places on the grounds of finding a few old bones and indulging in economic bullying against folk they had recently fought with side by side against the Persian enemy.

These events tell much about what had developed in the league in the years since Mycale. After the Athenians took over leadership, most of the members, from places from the mainland to the Hellespont, around the Bosphorus or the Anatolian shore, had stopped stumping up fully-equipped ships and men and, rather, just contributed funds to give the Athenians the wherewithal to fight the good fight for them. These Greeks wanted revenge against the Persians who had taken such an awful toll for their show of independence in the Ionian revolt and a guarantee against any repetition of this in the future but were happy not to spill their own blood to this end. Cimon had encouraged this, urging the confederates to hand over their warships which the Athenians could equip and man with the tribute coming in. Though convenient for many of the smaller communities, it inevitably created

a two-tier system, with a big few like Chios, Lesbos and Samos retaining significant navies and providing the military wherewithal, their men continuing to fight on the benches and in the ranks against the Persian enemy, and the rest paying tribute into Athenian coffers. Up until their falling out with Athens, clearly Thasos too had kept its own armed forces. It could not have fought a battle at sea without them. However, after surrendering to end the siege, this finished too.

A significant change occurred soon after this affair. Thirty-one members of the Hellenic league had been noted on the serpent column or Plataea Tripod, still standing in the centre of Istanbul, and while discounting those in the Peloponnesian League many others had joined the Athenians in their anti-Persian war. It was agreed to site the League treasury at the island of Delos, sacred to Ionians as the birthplace of Apollo and Artemis, where it remained until 454 BC. Here payments were gathered to fund the war and, with the Peloponnesians not interested, it was inevitably the Athenians who took real control of the finances and the sinews of power that came with them. And it was their man Aristides 'the best and most honourable man in Athens' who was crucial. He had a great reputation for financial rectitude, and he was so trustworthy he was left to look after the loot when army rushed back to Athens after the victory at Marathon, allowing him to organize the tribute payments in a way that the payees found tolerable. Iron was flung into the sea to demonstrate the permanence of this coalition to punish the Persians, and activity followed hard on the heels of commitment. Extant tribute lists have been found starting in the year 454–3 BC that are detailed if not comprehensive, and none actually mention the war against the barbarians as the aim of the outlay. Already the Delian League had become a league of Athenian allies as much as the Peloponnesian League was a league of Sparta's, a fact made palpable in 454 BC when the treasury was moved from Delos to the acropolis of Athens. The *Aparche*, first fruits of the harvest, one-sixtieth of tribute of each member, was set aside as dues for Athena, and from this it is possible to calculate the money available from a membership that might have climbed to as high as 200 when small places in Caria joined after Cimon cruised as far as Cyprus in 450 BC. Calculations give a total of almost exactly the 460 talents that was claimed as the initial tally, later increased to 600 by Pericles.

While Athens was expanding she was changing. The years of the Delian League war, saw constitutional developments that enshrined

something like a very real direct democracy, indeed one that has been admired down the generations. Even before Xerxes' invasion, much had been in place, masterminded by a radical limb of the Alcmaeonids, a very old noble family, called Cleisthenes who had made a career under the tyrants before becoming the head of a freedom party in exile. Frustrated in his first attempts to overthrow Peisistratid family rule in Athens, eventually, Spartan assistance made the difference, allowing both the achievement of freedom and the introduction of reforms to involve many more of the citizenry in the political process. Cleisthenes had mobilised the clout of the people to back his power play against another noble faction but once the role of a people's Assembly was expanded and men from most classes were coopted to fill the juries there was no turning back. Even when the Spartan king, Cleomenes, in the last decade of the sixth century tried to put the genie of popular government back in its bottle the citizens of Athens, in a spontaneous mobilisation, saw him off.

The people meeting on the Pnyx became almost synecdochal for Athens itself. Nowhere before had the common people been so central. Nowhere else had the whole of the free male citizenry been included to such effect that almost automatically the city became an ideological engine, impacting far and wide in the Hellenic world. Yet despite these developments, that since the ending of the Hippias tyranny in 510 BC, and the introduction of a broadly democratic constitution of Cleisthenes, a body remained through which the old aristocracy still ruled the roost. This was the Areopagus, made up of ex archons, the top state officers drawn by lot from the old aristocracy; they acted as a kind of senate. This body had gained great credit in the Persian war for putting backbone into people before Salamis and funding the crews of the triremes that would win the war for them.<sup>2</sup> But while Cimon was building the empire, these people were beginning to be sidelined. In the 460s a domestic rival of Miltiades' son, named Ephialtes, was instrumental in ensuring that the key duty of vetting and auditing the officers of generals, and those commissioned as foreign embassies, was taken away from this body and given to the people in the courts. His reforms lasted and were crucial because these posts were not filled by lot like most but were generally occupied by men with family and money. While these vital executives had been overseen by their peers, the people had not really been in control, but with the eclipse of the Areopagus the commons took a real handle on the levers of power. This, on top of his introducing pay and the reduction of property qualifications for holding public office, made

Epialtes enemies in the old ruling class; which makes his assassination in 461 BC no great surprise.

Democracy, from ancient Greece to our own day, is always wrought by tension between the impulse for all to have a real say in government, and the impossibility of achieving this when disparities of income are great. The only possibility for real democracy is to ensure a reasonably even spread of wealth, so no massively-rich elite can buy its way to power despite the very constitutional arrangements that seem to ensure popular authority. Western capitalist countries clearly suffer from this blight, but unlike their Greek counterparts there seems little will to address it. This could not be said of our forbears two and a half thousand years ago. The Athenians, whatever their failings, tried to cut this Gordian knot, ensuring involvement of the populace by filling their administration largely with lottery-chosen men. Furthermore, if the ten generals and diplomats continued largely still to be elected from the rich, at least the people in courts of 200–500 citizens, chosen from an annual panel of 6,000, checked their qualification to hold office and held them severely to account at the end of their terms. And ostracism was important too, where in a one-off vote all the people could decide which high-profile figure, whose predominant financial or political position had begun to worry people, would be exiled for ten years. The Athenians made the connection between the nexus of automatic corruption between wealth and power and, in the years after the Persian epic, tried to set limits to a rich elite buying back the control they had once owned outright by a blue-blood birthright.

But even these enterprising Greeks could not ensure against money not only talking but swearing as well. Indeed, leadership in the city would soon become almost monopolised by a man very much from old landed wealth. A young progressive politician emerged in the 470s. He would come to personify the Athens of his time. Pericles, himself kin of the earlier radical Cleisthenes, won domestic support as the voice of the popular party, making more key constitutional changes, and pushing through increased payments for the men selected to fill the courts. This was crucial stuff, allowing others than just the well-heeled to take part in these key forums of civic action. Pericles was an Alcmaeonidae, one of the oldest Athenian lineages, though one with a deeply dodgy past of sacrilege and treason, but despite class kudos he did not quite have the ready money of his rival Cimon. So to keep his supporters cheerful it was public funds he

needed to spend. This was in contrast to his personal finances. The women of his household, apparently, held him to be very stingy when it came to their demands for the latest fashions. This people's patrician was opposed in the assembly first by Cimon and then by another, Thucydides; articulators of an oligarchic way, the party of the 'good and true' against the *demos*.<sup>3</sup> And between them was the usual tit for tat. We know Pericles prosecuted Cimon on at least one occasion, and was almost certainly instrumental in getting both his adversaries ostracised; Cimon went just before 450 BC, Thucydides in 443 BC.

Pericles was the mover behind ten years of planning for the Parthenon before building was began in 447 BC. The venerable high rocky home of the virgin goddess Pallas Athena and the sacred snake whose continued presence guaranteed the preservation of the city was going to be changed out of recognition. There had been plenty built there before, temples going back to a legendary age and monuments that aggrandised their patrician sponsors as much as the city but what had for centuries been redolent of a mason's yard had since Xerxes' passing had more of an old bonfire about it. That would change, with the emergence of an immense and wonderful edifice that would etch Pericles' name in history, even if there were killjoys who claimed that the new constructions gave Athens the look of a whore decked out in her finery.<sup>4</sup> This was not an opinion likely to be shared by many who processed behind the 100 oxen driven up the Acropolis for sacrifice during the Great Panathenaia, and particularly not by the girls who had spent nine months weaving the purple and saffron-yellow emblazoned *peplos* that would be draped round Athena's shoulders as highlight of the ceremony. This was an occasion that, after a pious attention to the deities, saw games, poetry and music performed for the edification of humanity. It is likely that part of this procession is depicted on the Parthenon frieze, which shows a military parade when citizens were allowed to wear swords, something that turned out fatal for one of Athens' later tyrants as he was making his way to join the party. But it was not only the magical show of the sun blazing down on bright-coloured friezes, pediments and statuary that mattered for the great Athenian who commissioned the Parthenon. If Plutarch and Aristotle are credited this was all part of a plan by Pericles to provide wages and occupation for all Athenians. It was to give employment and subsistence to the labourers and artisans engaged on beautifying the Acropolis, or working on the 372 warship sheds being furbished at the port of Piraeus; or others of the non propertied class, as oarsmen on the benches of the Delian League triremes, as soldiers on foreign

garrison duty, or even as colonists ensuring the loyalty of the locals in the lands where they were planted.

The engine of Athens' push for empire had been the trireme. The story of the city's acquisition of her navy centres on Themistocles persuading his fellow citizens to forgo a city-wide handout from a silver strike at Laurium in order to build a fleet of 200 triremes for use against her neighbour Aegina. Yet there was another context. An old truism exists that any military establishment, however amateur or professional, always makes its preparations to fight the last war. For Athens, the last conflict of significance had been the Marathon invasion, and while her soldiers had done well it had only been by dint of hard marching and fighting combined with a good pinch of luck that they had survived at all. The greatest menace had been the enemy fleet that allowed them to jump quickly and unopposed from one part of the coastline to another. To counter this danger it was a must to build a fleet of the kind, quality and numbers that the Persians had brought against them in 490 BC. The ships that fought the battles when the invaders came again were war galleys, with three levels of oars, and a ram at the prow, whose provenance is considerably debated. They seem to have made their appearance around 700 BC in Phoenicia or possibly Corinth, and may have first been deployed by a tyrant of Samos or a king of Egypt. Yet the evidence is inconclusive, and their vessels may have been biremes, but certainly three-tiered ships appeared in numbers during the sixth century, and use of the bronze-capped ram in a tactical way was brought in around the same time. Before this, ships had been mainly used for transport, and if fleets came together at sea they would get alongside and fight it out with arrow, spear and sword. But this changed with these triremes, mortise-and-tenon constructions, built out of oak, fir, pine and beech to hold 170 oarsmen in 120 feet of space. It was a squeeze, particularly as the hull was only fifteen to twenty feet across, with the *thalamite* oarsmen deep in the bowels, *zygotes* in the centre and the *thranites* on the outrigger at the top. The last were paid a bonus as the only member of the team of three who could see the blades entering the water, and so were able to guide their mates. Half their wages were stumped up at the start of the campaign while anticipation of the rest acted as insurance against desertion to re-sign up with an enemy offering higher pay. Apart from this motive force there was a crew of sixteen sailors, ten hoplites and four archers to fight from the deck.



Their hulls were held tight round by great hawsers to give some solidity but still these ships could only really function on placid seas, and they were awfully at risk if exposed to any sort of weather. They had little space to carry supplies, so the hundreds of men aboard almost always needed to land each night. They were so crowded that a small squadron of thirty vessels would spew out 10,000 men at least, onto the beach ideally close to a river mouth where plenty of fresh water was available. There they could cook their meals or just enjoy the luxury of space after cramped hours on board ship. In the milky calm waters that were prevalent in Greece's summer they were an awesome instrument of imperial power, but they were also deeply fragile if handled badly or caught in bad conditions. They needed to be regularly pulled out of the water and dried because they were subject to water logging, to rot, to barnacles and being eaten by worms. The bottom of their hulls were waxed for some protection rather than having the lead sheath common to many merchantmen. Their structure was quite light and, in battle, when struck, triremes did not tend to sink straight away, and could often be salvaged by the victors, to be dried out and renovated. The prow was the strongest part of the hull, with the heaviest timbers used to carry the ram. For distance, a large square sail could be raised on its mast in the middle of the vessel, though generally it was left behind before entering combat. Cimon himself is accredited with having his warships decked over rather than just retaining a narrow passage down the middle, allowing a larger number of troops to be carried and to give some protection to the top tier of rowers.

They were fast enough, travelling up to 130 miles under oars in a sixteen-hour day, but very expensive. In the next century, for which we have figures, just the wooden oars and masts and rope gear costs 2,300 drachma, (one drachma was very roughly the daily wage of a skilled worker) and 7,500 more to replace the hull. There were stories of captains at Athens having to go to court to get the ship's gear that the previous commander had stripped out and taken when he had stepped down from command. It could be an honour, but also an obligation, for wealthier citizens to equip ships as part of their civic duty, and while some tried to cut corners others outlaid their own resources to compete for the prize for best turned out ship given by the commander when the fleet left the Piraeus. These fragile weapons were deeply expensive to run but, for several centuries, they were always the ship of the line of choice in Mediterranean waters. They were only eclipsed in the Macedonian centuries when much larger

ships, with far more oarsmen, could be mobilised from the deep pockets of Hellenistic kings, whose larger complement of troops and sometimes even deck-mounted war engines could outgun the trireme. Even during that time, the smaller ship remained a utility vessel not only in Seleucid, Ptolemaic and Antigonid mega fleets but in the police-force navies of Rome, when that empire ran out of significant maritime rivals like Carthage, Macedonia, Ptolemaic Egypt and the Seleucids.

Cyrus the first Great King of Persia, after he had defeated Croesus, monarch of Lydia, in the 540s and was receiving ambassadors, had famously inquired about the brusque red-cloaked men in front of him and asked 'who are the Spartans?' There was an edge of contempt to the inquiry but this would not have been shared at the time by the peoples of the Peloponnese, and, indeed, of the rest of Greece, who had felt the flail of that people's ire. This remote community in the valley of the Eurotas, claiming descent from the immigrant offspring of the demigod Heracles, might accept themselves as conservatives, happy to do things the traditional way, to sit at home and enjoy what, at least in Greek terms, were reasonably expansive fertile acres between the Taygetos mountains and the sea. These reactionaries, loving an autarky, did not even use specie, because of the corrupting taint of a commercial way of life, but this was not the whole picture. The city sat below a bluff where the Menelaum still stands, a shrine named for their legendary king who had called the whole of Greece to march on Asiatic Troy to get his beautiful spouse back from her abductor. These people would leave home when it suited, and, over several centuries before the great Persian war, they had conquered rich Messene, west over the mountains and semi enslaved its people as serfs, to add them to the helots already degraded to semi slavery in Laconia, and whose exploitation allowed Spartan citizens to dedicate themselves to becoming the very best soldiers in Greece.

For Athens, the symbol of power was a sleek, high-prowed trireme but, appropriately, for iron-rich Sparta it was the hoplite infantryman, the heirs of those foot soldiers who won the Messene wars. They had been effective in concluding that epic struggle in a way the haughty and noble cavaliers who had previously run the place had not, and to them the future belonged, enshrined by the Lycurgan revolution. The man who originated this, or perhaps a number of men, had solved the problem of agrarian class tension by dividing up all the land Sparta controlled from the eastern coast of Laconia to the western literal of

Messene, and settling 10,000 or so citizens on lots worked by a mass of helot serfs. If the quality of soldiers this system produced had won the admiration of the Greek world, the kind of warrior itself was typical of most Hellenic communities. On the battlefield the Greeks had established, over a few centuries, a generally-accepted method of reaching a military decision. Homeric heroes stepping down from their chariots to spear their peers, with the *hoi polloi* looking on, were long gone and a high horse aristocracy indulging in something like large-scale rustling as a form of warfare had also become a thing of the past. Now the host of middling farmers met to thrash things out, each carrying something like seventy pounds of battle gear that was pretty identical whether worn by friend or foe.

Apart from the shield that gave them their name they were modestly protected, perhaps a breastplate of leather, metal or linen in various styles, a helmet and less often a pair of greaves to guard below the knees. But what mattered was the *hoplon*, a round deeply-dished shield made of wood. Usually faced with a thin sheet of bronze, it protected the body from chin to knees. Fighting formations were simple enough. It was the solid rank of one armoured man after another, each supporting his comrade in front and able to replace him if he fell. Shoulder to shoulder, citizens who gossiped in the agora stood solid, prepared to die for the man next to him. They were armed with one of the most basic instruments of war. A stick with a point, a spear, seven to nine foot long, and when wielded in conjunction with men on the right, left and from behind it showed a daunting hedgehog of points; though only the first three ranks could push their weapons forward far enough to reach the enemy. This phalanx, perfected during the seventh century, was a team effort with mutual support as the key; most important was the man next along whose shield covered the exposed part of the warrior on his left. The strength of the formation was its cohesion, whether to roll over the enemy in front, or to stand firm when they tried the same, to show a shield defence that if fractured with comrades falling out of place meant every individual would be very vulnerable, but if it stood firm should be almost unbreakable.

But there was always tension. The team player was at the same time a highly competitive man eager to make a reputation, a name. They came from a tradition stretching back to a heroic age when Achilles won by skill at arms; but in hoplite warfare disciplined steadiness was what counted, and the individual out to gain renown

by leaving the ranks, to duel with an opponent, would not be in place to protect his comrade next in the line. The term for a loyal friend was the same as that for the man in the line beside you in the phalanx, and the Theban Sacred Band would take this to its logical conclusion, being comprised of 150 pairs of lovers fighting side by side. Trophies were awarded for the bravest in battle, and to win such was hugely prized, and the equivalence with triumph on the sporting field is highlighted by the fact that one of the rewards for a Spartan who won at the Olympic Games was that he might be stationed to protect his king in the front line of combat. Whether it was Tyrtaeus the war poet of Sparta, an Athenian philosopher or tragedian it was standing your ground that counted, that showed 'arête', 'virtue' or 'excellence'. Indeed, Herodotus makes a credibility-stretching claim that a man called Sophanes chained himself from the belt to an anchor stuck in the ground so he could not be moved from his place in the battle line.<sup>5</sup>

When thinking of how these soldiers fought what should not be forgotten is that throughout the ages human psychology usually trumped any other factor. The primary motivation for most men in battle is survival, indeed in most societies to kill even an enemy is to break long-instilled social norms. What has to be imagined in these stand-up fights is of men hunkered down behind their shields for protection, using their spears to keep the enemy opposite at bay, rather than to necessarily kill him. Certainly passion intervenes to change the dynamic, the desire to get back at an opponent who has killed your friend or brother, or anger boiling over against people who are trying to do you harm. Or even the altruistic urge to halt the antagonist in an effort to protect your comrades; these are usual but it is only a psychopathic nature whose primary aim from the start is to slay. And the idea that the murderous criminal of civilian society might become the best of soldiers is not a new one at all. But there are few of these individuals, and the bloodlust of most men is unusual and brief. What, however, made the graduates of the Spartan system so potent was that a whole way of life had adjusted their mindset to one where attitudes to killing and dying were different, and it was this that for centuries gave them an edge.

The Spartans were aberrant in other ways too. Supported by helot-tilled acres they were unlike the conscripted warriors of other states who had to return to the farm and get the harvest in. There was organisational sophistication as well, levels of leadership just not found elsewhere. There were five grades of officer between hoplite

and king, while in the Athenian army between commanding general and soldier there seem to have only been two. This, in combination with training and that they advanced to battle to the music of flutes and time kept by pipes, meant they could attempt manoeuvres others could not dream off. And they practised obedience as a form of excellence in itself, while in other places authority had often to be earned not by just holding a position, but by being excellent at the job. In some other armies mutiny was almost more the norm than discipline; the Athenian Xenophon, a commander of troops as well as the chronicler of a slightly later age, reports that he had, on one occasion, to get his men to vote to agree to support their officers. And, once, he was charged with having hit men under him, and for doing so was regarded as acting like a Spartan.

These hoplites were the very type of soldiers with which Sparta had come to dominate the Peloponnese, by fighting their equivalents and besting them, to become the accepted *hegemon* of most of the peninsula. Only the Argives, despite claiming a shared descent from Heracles, bitterly contested the predominance of a neighbour who she fought on and off for centuries. But unlike Athens and the Delian League the Spartans did not see her tributary allies as a source of wealth but as donors of manpower, auxiliary warriors to flesh out the limited soldiery she herself could deploy. This was the people who no Great King after Xerxes would ever ask the question who they were, and definitely no Greek would, now their prestige had been even further burnished by the exploits of Leonidas, Pausanias and Leotychides at Thermopylae, Plataea and Mycale. The Athenians and the men from Laconia had been involved with each other for centuries, sometimes as friends and allies and sometimes as bitter foes. Before the Persian wars, the Spartan king, Cleomenes, a man Pausanias could have taken his cue from for intrigue, succeeded in removing the Athenian tyrant, something the Delphic oracle had been demanding for a long time. Indeed, on not a few occasions, Spartan armies were seen in the Attic fields below the Acropolis, called in by one faction's ambitious power player or another. So, unsurprisingly, these people were used to having quite a say in what happened at Athens; they had found living with that city's march to empire stressful from the start.

The first hint of trouble ahead had come just as the victory over the Persians had been won, and the Athenians were returning to their twice-charred hearth and homes. Themistocles was at the centre. This

man who created the Athenian navy, that had done so much to win the war, was an extremely slippery operator and showed it in post war dealings with his partners. Spartan strategists were pretty determined that the Athenians should not have defensive walls around their rebuilt town, the argument was that if she did so the Persians might come back and take it over as a strongpoint. But really they feared Athenian potential if secure against Peloponnesian arms that were notoriously deficient in Poliorcetical expertise. Themistocles went on embassy to the Eurotas to keep the Spartans talking while back at Athens they threw up jerry built defences, using the stone from the temples the Persians had demolished. By the time his hosts realised what was happening, it was too late. That they had been duped by this particular man rubbed salt in the wound; it had not been not long since they had given him the unprecedented honour of being escorted back to their border, after another ambassadorial visit, by a king's honour guard.

While this fox had been tweaking the tiger's tail, the Spartans had been at the head of the armed forces making great strides in liberating the Greek world, but as we have seen their hold on leadership had not lasted long. Sparta found herself without the heart to continue the war against Persia, and a failure of will at home coincided with the decision by the Aegean Greeks that they did not want to follow these uncongenial people anyway. But of course for many this reality in no way mitigated their resentment against the Athenians, who they saw as usurping Sparta's natural directorial role. Cimon's triumphs, despite the man himself being a close friend to their city, made a spectre of imperial Athens, both real and worrying, and around 465 BC we learn this concern had turned into a preparedness to do something, to take action against a power whose military success had become to look like a deadly threat to the paranoid authorities in Laconia. When the north Aegean island of Thasos revolted from the Delian League because of bickering over the economic exploitation of coastal Thrace they sent envoys to Sparta where they found a warm reception from people apparently prepared to openly go to war with Athens. To prevent the enslavement of these island Greeks to an Athenian behemoth the Spartans agreed to mobilise the Peloponnesian League and invade Attica itself. Though an argument can be made, the whole of this was fable, a legend of Spartan duplicity to throw in the face of Cimon, a man whose reputation was in thrall to a Laconoplile programme.

If it was true, though, it looked like a fuse was lit for war only

fifteen or so years after the Persian Epic. The Spartans were apparently prepared to take up arms against their old partner because her claim of pre-eminence amongst the Hellenes was under threat, and she was not prepared to countenance it. Yet elemental forces intervened to stop this ignition, as tectonic activity and rebellious helots brought Spartan thoughts right back home:

‘During this year a great and incredible catastrophe befell the Lacedaemonians; for great earthquakes occurred in Sparta, and as a result the houses collapsed from their foundations and more than twenty thousand Lacedaemonians perished.’<sup>6</sup>

These deaths following this awful tremor may have been the event that saw the commencement of a decline in Spartan manpower, that would, in several more generations, become debilitating. Others see the affects as far more partial<sup>7</sup> but they were sufficient to put off any thoughts of a pre-emptive strike against the Athenians, ensuring that Thasos faced its tormentors alone. By now Sparta was no longer concerned with these faraway places as they faced something very like ruin in their own backyard. Messene exploded in the nightmare scenario. The helots over the Taygetos mountains, taking advantage of a Sparta shaken by natural disaster, threw over their masters and dug in at Mount Ithome in the centre of their country, and where the town of Messene would be established after a later and more final secession in a hundred year’s time. There they were joined by *perioikoi*, a free but un-enfranchised class of inhabitant, from Thuria and Aethaea, places to the south near the border with Laconia. This high spot, named for its resemblance to a heap of rocks, had previously boasted a Mycenaean palace owing fealty to Pylos, a town destroyed by the Spartans when they conquered Messene in the eighth century. On this site the rebels prepared to do or die against neighbours who had oppressed them for so long. Some sixteen miles up from Kalamata, it was extremely defensible with old ramparts reconstructed that made this natural fortress even stronger, perched high to observe enemies advancing against it.

King Archidamus took command against the insurgents, a man whose quick action had prevented the helots in Sparta from joining in the mutiny. The uprising he threw himself into suppressing lasted a good few years in the 460s and 450s, with Mount Ithome always the epicentre. Details of this profoundly alarming period are thin; we know a Spartan called Arimnestus, famous as the hero who killed Mardonius with a thrown stone at Plataea, was himself slain in battle

with 300 men at Stenyclarus, the old capital of Messene in the plain northeast of Mount Ithome. These troubles naturally raised the spirits of some of Sparta's less happy peninsular associates who utilised her time of peril to try and assert their independence, though others stuck loyally by their *hegemon*, bringing troops to the army assaulting the revolutionaries' refuge. Nor was it just League stalwarts that the Spartans could thank for having stood by her in times of peril; the Athenians, too, had turned up trumps. This was a matter of particular importance because they could be expected to bring experts in siege warfare, to help reduce the rebels to their knees. Cimon, still power manipulator-in-chief in Athens, persuaded his fellows to respond to the pleas for help and, on one occasion, the suggestion is there were two Athenian expeditions to the Messenian war; he brought 4,000 men to join the siege camp in the plain below the fortress. But, despite their leader's prestige and Laconophile leanings, even he could not prevent things finally ending very badly. The Spartans did not show the kind of appreciation the Athenians might have expected, and began to worry. They concluded that their guest's expertise in siegecraft might not be worth the bad influence avowed democrats could have amongst their own lower orders and those of their allies. So, self important men from Attica, from prosperous hoplite farmers to horse raising nobility, expecting a good show of appreciation, instead found their host claiming their services were no longer required. This was not only insulting but it whiffed of their hosts playing some sort of game with the people who had come to help them. And the implication could not be clearer when, as Cimon and his Athenians marched out on the road back home, the rest of the allies were pointedly kept on the roster.

Even if Spartan dealings with Thasos may have been chimera, this rebuff caused huge resentment:

‘the Athenians took this incident as the first cause of the estrangement of the two states, and later on, quarrelled, embarking upon great wars ...’<sup>8</sup>

Cimon's reputation must have suffered, and with few Athenians still prepared to laud their old allies for their good government, it is no great surprise he was ostracised not long after, and the old friendship he represented became unfashionable, as other leaders, less enamoured of the Laconic way, found the route to power and influence. The first fruits were very significant as the Athenians found interests in common with the Argives, Sparta's great peninsular rival.



That things had fundamentally altered was made clear when, finally, the anti-Persian alliance that had at least still formally stood since the years of Salamis and Thermopylae was dissolved. Other pieces also fell into place on the road to war in the middle of the century. The problem of Ithome was resolved but the outcome caused more discord. The defenders surrendered on terms that they were allowed to leave the Peloponnese as free people, and, after experiencing exile from their home, they found, in the Athenians, friends prepared to set them up in Naupactus on the north shore of the Gulf of Corinth. This was an act that allowed some release for the resentment that people felt against the old partners who had so recently snubbed them. The corollary, though, was that it left many Spartans fuming that these deep-died enemies had been allowed to dig in just across the water from the Peloponnese. Despite their confidence having been shaken by the calamities suffered in the last few years, they were likely to want to do something about it.

The Delian League, born in 478 or 477 BC, had been producing 460 talents a year for the Athenians, allowing the beefing up of their navy to the point where she hardly had a maritime rival in all Greece. If this was not bad enough, twenty years later the people, their city long protected by defensive ramparts, began work on the long walls leading from Athens to its ports, both the Piraeus and Phalerum bay. With these finished Athens would have made itself virtually invulnerable as, even if blockaded by an enemy occupying the countryside of Attica, it could sustain its people from food imported across waters their triremes ruled. The Athenians had won the rewards by leading the fight against the barbarian curse, and her people had won renown, able to look the shades of their fathers who fought at Marathon squarely in the face. With these rewards came costs, not only financial but in blood, sweat and tears. She might have her Laurium silver and the tribute talents but there were no rivers with gold-flecked sediment as in Thrace or Anatolia, and wood had to be bought to build her battleships, and grain was needed to feed her hungry. She was no great Asian monarchy with resources to burn to make room in its pockets for more. Athens was an imperial power very likely to be subject to overstretch; a condition exemplified when in 460 BC a fleet of 200 warships went on campaign in Cypriot waters to face off the Great King's navy. But, not considering this test enough, the officers in charge allowed themselves to be diverted even further from home to help a Libyan dynast in Egypt, who had instigated revolution against the occupying Persians. Called in to aid the cause

with high hopes, they entered this country proverbially so rich and fertile, cruising up the Nile to Memphis to attack the Persians and their local supporters.

For worthies in the Eurotas valley this just indicated more of that overweening ambition they were beginning to see as absolutely the Athenian style, and, soon enough, other news deepened the frowns in the brows of these men. Word arrived concerning Athenian activity much nearer home. The authorities at Megara, distressed by some border bullying at the hands of fellow Peloponnesian League member Corinth, decided to throw in their lot with an Athens looking like it was on the up. Megara even allowed this neighbour who she had never loved before to put garrisons in Pagae and Nisaea, her ports on the Corinthian and Saronic gulfs, and even allowed her to build her own long walls to the sea. This was as incendiary as anything the Athenians could have done, not only making Corinth into an open and bitter enemy, but annoying the Spartans who now could no longer contemplate utilising the key Megara corridor into central Greece that allowed her to join up with friends like the Boeotians, or to discipline Athens with threats of invasion. There may have been satisfaction here for Athens about how they had been treated at Mount Ithome, but it was stoking up not just immediate trouble with the Corinthians but laying down poison for the future as well.

The immediate consequence was a naval kerfuffle with Corinth and her friends from Epidaurus on the south coast of the Agolid that Athens lost, but soon recouped with a maritime victory in 459 BC which seems to have been seen by many as the first proper action of the first Peloponnesian war. Then, from making friends of one old enemy, the Athenians decided on a different disposal of another. Aegina, another Peloponnesian Leaguer, was too tempting a target once the Athenians got their navy fully mobilized. A major battle resulted in seventy of the islanders' ships being captured after what is described as a 'great battle at sea' and the town itself was besieged. This long siege was eventually wrapped up:

'This was accomplished for the Athenians by their general Leocrates, who was engaged in the war with the Aeginetans nine months in all.'<sup>9</sup>

But during this traumatic time it became the heart of a conflict, which, as *hegemon* of the Peloponnesian League, Sparta would almost be bound to join.

One of her first overt acts of war was when 300 veteran Peloponnesian hoplites were thrown in to boost the island defences,

and this while the Corinthians advanced through the Gerania hills towards Megara. The Athenians, full of confidence, were not drawn off from Aegina, but mobilized the old and young to defend the western front, just opened. A man called Myronidas was put in command. He was clearly what Napoleon would have appreciated as a lucky general. He drew the first encounter but when the enemy, claiming victory, came back to put up a trophy he was waiting. Emerging from Megara he drove off the Corinthian troops all the way back from where they had come, while one division got lost and ended in a field with ditches all around, and were butchered by Athenian missile men.

Any expansion of bloodletting needed justification, so the Spartans, on moving the epicenter to Boeotia, with a very large army validated their actions by claims that the ancestral home of the Dorians was in danger. The reality may well have been that it was another attempt to try once again to draw the Athenians away from the siege of Aegina. The action itself had involved the Phocians attacking the nearby town of Doris, possibly in 458 BC, and a Spartan regent arriving with 1,500 hoplites and 10,000 allies in response. These seem to be huge numbers just to suppress these local troublemakers, and ensure reversion to the status quo ante, but, once they achieved what they came for, the Spartans had no thoughts but to get back home. But the Athenians entered the picture; fifty of their ships based at Pagae obstructed any route for the Spartans across the Gulf of Corinth, and the home army blocked the passes back through to the Megarid. With an easy way home not an option, the Spartan-led host based themselves at Tanagra very near the Athenian borderland. Intentions here are opaque. It seems clear the Spartans had agents at Athens trying to gee up local oligarchs to try a coup against the democracy, but some people have argued it as part of a plan to build some Theban-centered Boeotian league as makeweight to Athens in this part of the world. The results were dramatic as the Athenians swarmed out of Attica and over the Cithaeron hills with the whole of their levy, 1,000 Argives and auxiliary Thessalian cavalry, altogether 14,000 strong. The resulting tussle at Tanagra ended with a handsome Peloponnesian win, where the key to success was a Thessalian double-cross in mid battle. But the Spartan regent Nicomedes, a son of Cleombrotus, did nothing to exploit his triumph, perhaps suggesting the official explanation for the campaign was all there was in it, and having achieved their aims the instructions were just to get the men home.

Sixty-two days later, lucky Myronides stepped up again. He

invaded Boeotia, defeated a local army at Oenophyta and took over the place lock, stock and barrel:

‘In my opinion this action was in no way inferior to any of the battles fought by the Athenians in former times; for neither the victory at Marathon nor the success over the Persians at Plataea nor the other renowned exploits of the Athenians seem in any way to surpass the victory which Myronides won over the Boeotians.’<sup>10</sup>

Though the extent of this winning stroke is again disputed, and one contemporary suggests Thebes was never suppressed and that, rather than Attic domination, the whole of Boeotia was left in stasis with pro-Spartan and pro-Athenian factions at each other’s throats.<sup>11</sup> The Athenians, though, assuredly did overrun the Opuntian Locrians, and demanded these people disgorge 100 of their richest men as hostages, and commanded the dismantling of Tanagra’s walls. Athenian advantage in Boeotia grew with an enemy’s navy given up, and a cherry settled nicely on the cake when messengers returned with intelligence that an Athenian general, Tolmides, had circumnavigated the Peloponnese, burnt Sparta’s naval arsenal at Gythion, taken a Corinthian place called Chalcis on the north shore just outside the mouth of the Gulf of Corinth and defeated Sparta’s loyal ally Sicyon when their men came out to battle against the raiders.

With their generals in this groove, the populace could have been forgiven for seeing the bright sun of success as a semi-permanent guest of the precocious democratic empire, but such confidence was soon shown to be foolish in 454 BC as a dark cloud rolled up; when, after six years, just a few survivors of the Delian League Egyptian army struggled into Cyrene, from where they sent word back home. A real change of fortune had seen the Greeks in Egypt almost all lost. The Persians had finally cobbled together sufficient resources, and driven the Greeks from the field and besieged them on Prosopitis, an island in the Nile, for eighteen months, before, by the use of judicious spade work, they managed to abolish the Athenian intruders almost entirely. This setback was the first of others. Next, an expedition sent to put back a prince called Orestes into power in Pharsalus in Thessaly went wrong. The soldiers dispatched could not cope with the local cavaliers, and this was not the last reverse at the time. Pericles, though great as a civic leader, was only a middling military talent, and achieved little in a raid from Pagae into the Gulf of Corinth while leaving key places in Euboea under threat from the Boeotians, an enemy also handily placed to harass Athenian colonists there.

Where before the Athenians in this war had always seemed to get the rub of the green, now it was the opposite, so, when Cimon returned from exile, many listened to a man who, known as a friend of Sparta, might be able to deliver an end to hostilities. The chronology and the cocktail of motivation are difficult to know fully, but a drive to a cessation of hostilities around 451 BC led to a freezing of this first Peloponnesian war. The terms of the truce kept things pretty much as they were, which meant in Boeotia, where Orchomenus, as much as Thebes, was leading the opposition to Athens, all the Attic power could salvage was to get autonomy guarantees for friends like Thespie and Plataea, while they themselves concentrated on defending what were seen as more key interests in Megara and Euboea. The conflict had also turned into more trouble than Sparta had expected so when talk turned to a truce they were amenable too. Thus there was a hiatus in a war that had been going on in tandem with the anti-Persian crusade that Athens and Sparta had begun so long ago. This war with Sparta had made it abundantly clear that the Delian League was essentially now a tool of Athenian imperialism, and, for many members, it had been a long time since they felt gratitude towards Athens as a leader on the road to freedom. Now they paid up but with no illusions that it was any voluntary act that could be cancelled when they wished. There might be few garrisons or governors but the chains were real, and paying tribute was not in the least optional, particularly as Cimon was harnessed up again and bent on leading 200 Delian League vessels towards Cyprus. Interestingly, some of these ended up going to help their old ally in Egypt. It may have been access to the bounty of corn from there that kept them coming back. The others attacked the town of Citium on the south coast of the island.

This time it was not disaster, but Cimon's succumbing to a fatal illness at the siege, and a failure to procure provisions, meant that, despite giving bloody noses to the Great King's Phoenician, Cyprian and Cilician forces, little was achieved. But, even with these far-away irons in their imperial fire, the Athenians were unable to stay clear of trouble with closer neighbors. The five-year truce with Sparta did not have the legs to last, and by 448 BC a sacred war had morphed into the old Spartan-Athenian trouble. In this second round of war in Boeotia, the Spartans marched once more into central Greece to detach Delphi from the Phocians but again didn't stay long, only sufficient time to encourage resistance to Athenian hegemony. But at least this meddling was efficacious, sparking a well-timed insurgency

against an Athens which was heavily involved in Chalcis, Euboea, Pagae, Imbros and parts of Achaea. Initially it looked like the men from Attica were still in control when they quickly reinstated their Phocion protégés back at Delphi, but then they got slack. In 446 BC the general Tolmides, cocksure but stupid (Pericles had wanted to delay) took only 1,000 men to crush the troublemakers at Orchomenus, Chaeronea and some other places. After a bit of early illusory success, capturing the second named town, he found he did not have the troops to back him up, and was defeated in an ambush as they withdrew on the road towards Haliartus. After that, we learn from Aristotle and the 'old oligarch' that all the democracies in Boeotia crumbled without a dominant southern neighbour to back them up.

Interestingly, involved in the fighting against the Athenians were some Locrians and Euboean exiles. The experience of Attic hegemony had clearly not been to quite a few people's taste after only a brief acquaintance. In the face of this wide resistance, amongst Athenian strategists there was little enthusiasm for further talk of getting back in the ring, particularly at a time when Euboea was erupting. Indeed, just to ensure their dead from Tolmides' defeat did not lie out as food for dogs and buzzards, and that prisoners could come back home, they were prepared to pretty much give up the whole of their levers of influence in Boeotia. Soon, there were other reasons as well. Athens' enemies had, for once, started coordinating their efforts. The Megarans revolted, bringing in Corinthians, Sicyonians and Epidurians, and chased the Athenians and their friends into Nisaea port. Simultaneously, the Spartan king, Pleistoanax, invaded Attica as far as Eleusis and the Tryian plain. Pericles responded as best he could. He had been fighting fires in Euboea, worried about colonists who had been established for almost a century, from a time when the Chalcidians had joined an abortive attack on an Athens that had just divested herself of her last tyrant, and was experimenting with democracy. They needed protection but the Athenian understood priorities, and returned to pay off the Spartan invaders first. He was not the first of his family to appreciate the effectiveness of a kickback. Cleisthenes had probably used the same technique to dissipate a Peloponnesian invasion eighty years or so before. Then, returning to Euboea with fifty ships and 5,000 soldiers, Pericles made an example of some locals by planting 2,000 colonists on their land for the offence of slaughtering the crew of an Athenian warship that had washed up on their shore.

But the stress had become palpable in the Agora and on the Pnyx; the community had spread and bled over fifteen and more years, and, if there had been triumphs then there had been plenty of ragged and cavernous-eyed survivors, men returning from places like Egypt, Boeotia and Thessaly telling of Athenian corpses rotting on foreign strands. Butchers' bills had brought grief across the classes. Even the most diehard belligerents accepted that the people needed a period of recuperation even if the price was to make considerable concessions. The Peloponnesians were up for a settlement too. They needed to chase renewal after earthquakes, helot wars and the trashing of their coastline that reached its apogee when the dockyards at Gythium went up in smoke. So, in the winter of 446–445 BC, bruised men from both sides met to settle a mess of war that had covered Greece from Macedonia to Cythera:

‘A truce was made for thirty years, Callias and Chares negotiating and confirming the peace.’<sup>12</sup>

Reality had a bitter taste for the Athenians who had to agree to let much go. Megara was returned to the Peloponnesian fold, the ports of Nisaea and Pagae were evacuated, so any Athenian naval presence in the Corinthian gulf after this needs must get there by a peninsular circumnavigation. Footholds won on the coast of Achaea and the Agolid had to be returned, while Aegina was fudged, being given autonomy yet still paying tribute to the Athenians. After the meat was the good intention, a commitment to respect the alliances of the other, and to resolve any future disputes by arbitration in the context of a peace agreed for thirty years.

A few years earlier, in 449 BC, when the mid-war truce was in force, the Athenian Assembly had passed the proposition that, after so many years, the broken and burned remains of the temples on the Acropolis, left so the sacrilege and trauma of the Persian occupation would never be forgotten, should be reconstructed in the grandest style. Two years later the foundation stones of what would become the Parthenon were laid, and the vision of Phidias and Pericles would burn forever the most perfect image of architectural splendour into the Western consciousness. But, before taking this unilateral decision, the Athenians had called all the polities of Greece to discuss the matter, and, more than this, to see if a wholesale cooperative approach to their inter-state problems might be possible. A kind of congress of the whole of Greece was intended to construct a world independent of some fragile balance of power between the Athenian

and Peloponnesian power blocs. But this attempt to address interstate contention was scuppered from the start. The Spartans and their friends would not come. It was just too Athens-centered to be acceptable to people who already feared the growing power of that city. This refusal meant a future that could only be truce or war, nothing more far reaching at all. Tension would not go away as Athens made alliances in Acarnania, and Athenian merchants increased their influence in Thrace and Macedon, even the Hellespont and Black Sea to the east, and southwest too, towards Sicily and Italy. The years after the Thirty-Year Peace saw alliances made with Reggio and Lentini, and even Thurii may have been part of this push. Athenian-Megaran relations also remained difficult, with the 430s seeing something like a trade war brewing. What had been arranged in the mid 440s had been advertised as meant to last for three decades, but the question hovering in the wings was would it endure anywhere near that long.



## *Chapter Two*

### **The Road to War**

If the two great Greek powers in the 430s were Athens and Sparta, opposites in so many ways, it would not be either of those two that provided the motor for a great war. Another place that had been a maritime force, commercial powerhouse and colonial instigator was the moving instrument. Corinth had been wealthy and important but was now not quite in the league of the big two, yet she provided the trigger. This city had a great past. She had been a sea power when Athens was an infant in the maritime world, had peppered the Mediterranean with her colonies, and, positioned at the Isthmus, had prospered on the back of trade routes going both west to Sicily and Italy and east to the Aegean and Asia. This made a naval tradition that saw her even claimed as the inventor of the trireme. Her potters had been world beaters when Athens did little business in a market that, by the late fifth century, she dominated, and Corinth's people showed the way in politics as well; starting a fashion in tyranny that was taken up by most of her neighbours in the Greek world, and paved the way for the development of democracy in Athens. It was this place, sweating her influence in the Adriatic, that initiated the two conferences that counted down on the way to war.

The shift towards conflict sharpened in spring 433 BC, when envoys from Corcyra came, cap in hand, to Athens asking for assistance against an armada that Corinth was assembling to encompass her downfall. The invasion scare experienced by this Corinthian colony on Corfu Island from her mother city had gestated because of a dispute around Epidamnus, another colony the Isthmus community had planted much further north on the mainland coast. The Corcyraean envoys were confident men from a city that had grown virtually as great as her parent in the centuries since its founding. They had built a very considerable navy of the latest triremes, so, apart from arguing their rights in the dispute, they also stressed to their Assembly audience that they would be a very useful ally for the Attic city that she prophesied would soon to be embattled with a Peloponnesian League of which Corinth was a key member. And their arguments were persuasive, positioned as they were, able to offer bases on the route to Sicily, and shipped up in a manner second only to Athens itself. The response to their pleas was partial. The

Athenians agreed to enter a relationship of *epimachia* with Corcyra, an involvement certainly, but a little limp. This was in no sense a full alliance. It was merely a mutual defence pact. As part of their new friendship, they dispatched ten triremes to observe, as the contest over Epidamnus developed. And develop it did, for in August 433 BC the islands of Sybota, between the southern tip of Corfu and the mainland, saw the Corinthians make their attack and receive a setback. This was a reverse initially part caused by the skill of the small Athenian squadron already there, but more decisively by another larger number of their compatriots who arrived in the nick of time to pull the Corcyraean irons out of the fire.

So, the wind-blown salts careening their vessels in the Corinthian ports of Kenchrae and Lechaemum, who had long hated their Athenian maritime rivals, had even more reason to be incensed against that people who were now flagitiously interfering between mother city and their old colony. And on top of this, a northern dimension developed to provide another strand in the web leading to war. This too involved a place that was an old colony of Corinth, a community in Chalcidice called Potidaea that the Athenians intended to neuter before it could set itself at the head of a northern axis of revolt, including not only other nearby members of the Delian League but the king of Macedon as well. The details of all this will emerge in time but the crucial factor, now, was this other Corinthian plantation provided a further flashpoint in her mother city's deteriorating relations with the Athenians. Summer 432 BC had arrived in the Eurotas valley as more and more complaints piled up against these people. Corinthians, Megarans and other distressed allies had come to town to put their case to a meeting of the assembly of Spartiates.

The audience gathering to hear what was said came from a city that might not have been full of rare sights like Athens but its people never forgot how exceptional they were. They believed that their piety was one half of the compact that made them specially blessed by the gods, as only this could act as rationale for a people whose prosperity was grounded in enslaving another Greek population. In their idealised vision of themselves, as the true lovers of the right life in their 'happy valley', they were hardly unique. But their vision was uniquely strong, based on the success of the Lycinus experiment that itself informed a Peloponnesian dominion not tested in a very long time. They were a community whose way of life was forged in a sort of revolution but whose interpretation of her role showed an absolute

reverence for traditional ways. They had long sat crowing on top of their peninsula dung heap, and if this had given them huge confidence then it had also made most of their leaders insular; hidebound traditionalists who most outsiders saw as arrogant and condescending bullies who everybody was afraid of but few loved. This constituency, that normally revelled in an ostrich-like attitude to the outside world, had now began to include many who felt strongly about the issues being raised by their friends. The *ephors* who called the meeting had determined that it would be open, with outsiders allowed to have their say. This calling of foreigners, allies and others to address a Spartan assembly was not usual, indeed it is very difficult to discover another instance. That it was specially arranged could suggest the organizers wanted the war that they knew their allies would be clamouring for. In contrast, there are those who argue its very exceptionality indicates ‘how reluctant the Spartans still were to fight’.<sup>1</sup>

The Megaran and Aiginetian representatives are noticed amongst a number who were eager to make their case but the concluding appeal was made by an unnamed Corinthian. These people were good travellers prepared to go anywhere to make their case, and he painted a picture of an adventurous ever-restless, ever-expansionist Athens whose very nature made her anathema to the Spartans; ‘while you stay at home, they are always abroad.’ Spartan inattention, he argued, had allowed the growth of these dangerous peoples into a more-than-local superpower comparable to, if not greater than, Sparta itself. The Corinthian contention was that Sparta had let Athens grow over-mighty, to build walls round the city and down to the port that meant she could hold out against any combinations of enemies. The speaker railed against the Spartans for their preparedness to fight the Medes who were far away but not to keep tabs on the Athenian danger so much nearer home. She had left her allies to suffer at the hands of a Leviathan. Her inaction had allowed the threat to grow. While the sentiment expressed by this Corinthian, incensed about what had happened at Corcyra and Potidaea, is understandable, it must always be remembered that our source could seldom resist an opportunity to pick out and contrast the personalities of Spartans and Athenians as peoples.

The Corinthians’ argument might have seemed a dangerous line to take, likely to alienate their audience, but the speaker knew most of his listeners were eager for war, and it was only a peace party whose

reservations had to be overcome to get the whole people in support. But if there was pleading then there was also a sort of threat. This was that Corinth and others might have to look elsewhere if the Spartans were not up to the task of muzzling mad-dog Athens. The implication was that they might hook up with those other heirs of Heracles, the Argives. This would be bound to have an impact, as these people were always bitter rivals of Sparta and the only major Peloponnesian power not a member of their League. It was not that they had made any open commitments to help against the Athenians but even the possibility was painful to contemplate for all Spartans, whether they be rankers fresh from eating black broth in their messes, *ephors*, kings or other members of the Gerousia.

After these speeches were heard, we learn that there were people present who must have found the atmosphere menacing. These were some Athenians envoys in town on 'other' business of which we have no details, and now they spoke. Presumably far from happy, if a little intimidated with what they had heard, they prepared to face off the men who had been traducing them. It was an open meeting, and with no constraint on how they might respond. So after emphasizing they were in no position to answer specific complaints they had not been briefed on, there was something of threat in the rest of the address. If jumpy, then these ambassadors were representing a proud city, and so reprised Athens' patriotic efforts against the Persians, fifty years before, as a justification for their manifest great-power status. It was suggested that they only behaved like any hegemonic power, as Sparta did in her Peloponnesian sphere. The kick was clear that if Sparta considered taking her on in this war then they might find an opponent she could not easily best, and that any sensible person knew the affects of chance in a long conflict. War was dangerous, and the consequences unknown, so they represented Athens as eager to find a friendly way forward if there were sufficient people in Sparta who were of a like mind. They proffered a continuation of the Thirty Years Peace and suggested that issues between them should be arbitrated in the way envisaged by the treaty they had all put pen to in 446 BC.

These Greeks were not shouting into a void, as there were plenty of Spartans concerned about the prospect of war, and whose inclination was to keep their heads down and stay at home. Many worried that these Corinthians and their cohorts were embroiling them in something that might be in their interest, but not necessarily in those of Sparta and other League members. One of those who saw more

than just braggadocio in what the Athenians were saying was King Archidamus, the only monarch in the chamber, Pausanias still being a minor. He was of the Eurypontid line, and he had followed his grandfather, Leotychidas II, onto the throne in 476 BC after his predecessor had been exiled on bribery charges around some shifty conduct in Thessaly. This old man, young in the Persian wars, had seen it all. He had played his part in negotiating the Thirty Years Peace with Pericles, and was one of many in the Eurotas valley who were anxious that involvement in wars outside her bailiwick might bring their people into the tainted atmosphere of a wider foreign world. There is a story of him saving much of the Spartan army by leading it out of town before the great earthquake of the 460s struck, and while this may be legend the respect this old timer was held in by many of his peers was not.

The way the government of Sparta really worked is a matter of contention. Was it primarily a monarchy with its two kings? Or was it partly a democracy, as certainly the assembly of full Spartans 'yeaed or nayed' the great questions of state? Or was it an oligarchy of privileged Spartiates lauding it over classes of free but non-enfranchised *perioci* or enserfed helots? In fact, in essence, it was a gerontocracy, with the most important organ of power being the Gerousia Council of Thirty, made up of twenty-eight men over sixty years of age, sitting with the kings in deliberation. So Archidamus had huge authority. He was both an old man and a royal one, who saw the dangers for his people in a war of the elephant against the whale, and wanted them to see clearly what they could be getting themselves into. He praised the Spartan qualities of 'slowness and procrastination' that the Corinthian had derided. His people were moderate and wise. These were good things that he felt meant they should at least consider arbitration on issues like Potidaea and Corcyra; and that no definitive decisions on war should be made until Sparta was far more prepared to fight.

But if there were reluctant belligerents then there were more who had determined that Athens had become too powerful, and that she needed to be pulled down a peg or two while it was still possible. It is not difficult to understand why that city spooked them. It was the size of the place for one thing. The free population of the urban area was already near 100,000 with perhaps the same again in the country around, and its dynamism, ambition and capacity was undeniable. Even the great weakness of such a megalopolis was taken care of. To

feed such a number from the soil of Attica was impossible, but with her ships ruling the waves, Athens of the fifth century could ensure the sea lanes brought in sufficient grain to keep bellies full. Grain, salt and pickled fish could be brought from the broad lands round the Black Sea, where Hellenes had been planted for centuries. Apart from the calories provided by the wide wheat fields, up north, coin and timber were available too. Macedonia and Thrace could provide the shipbuilding wood that had long gone from the local hills, used up to make the first fleets commissioned by Themistocles. And there was gold and silver in the hills watered by the River Strymon, and on islands off the coast. A megalopolis that could feed itself, that could perpetuate its naval clout, whose pockets were stuffed with specie, was the kind of place that might build an empire. This is exactly what had happened in the years since Athens and Sparta had stood shield to shield and ship to ship in the face of Persian aggression. Memories of the tricks of Themistocles remained, despite his being ostracised and fleeing to Persia almost a half a century before. Athens was still a different and threatening place, with upwards of 10,000 energetic foreigners, *metics*, paying taxes for the privilege of living and trading in the metropolis adding even more to the wealth that built the Parthenon, the theatre of Dionysius, the Odeon and long walls that were wide enough to drive chariots along the top. Athens was always a growing and vibrant place, with the din made by tradesman's tools and the cries of commercial types as a background to characters like Socrates buttonholing fellow citizens in the marketplace to discuss the meaning of life, or smoother followers of fashion peddling the latest trends in rhetoric, politics and scientific thinking to the eager minds of those with the leisure and wherewithal to appreciate. Every accent from round the Aegean was heard along the roads from the ports, a polyglot mix that could not but make the xenophobes of Sparta shiver.

The group that was determined to put a brake on Athenian development was numerous and organized, and one of their number was the *ephor*, Sthenelaidas who brought a term to the debate. This hardly impartial chairman pushed the assembled Spartans to come to the aid of their allies and cry out for war against Athens. Yet still there was indecision enough that those present had to physically divide, like MPs entering a yeas or nays lobby. This was despite the fact that they normally decided matters by the loudness of their acclamation. When they split, the majority for war became abundantly clear. Indeed this may have been why Sthenelaidas did not accept the acclamation, wanting the strength of feeling against the Athenians to be made

absolutely clear. Whatever his motivation, the decision was taken that Athens was in breach of the terms of the Thirty Years Peace and a full League convocation was triggered to make a common resolution for war. Yet if the push to hostility looked almost unstoppable then Greek interstate relations were never that simple, and at the same time as the decision to convene the League was made Spartan representatives were dispatched to Athens. And the matters they raised there showed it was far from just the Isthmus power that had issues with the head of the Delian League. Much else was at stake too. There were demands that Megara be no longer subject to the interstate bullying represented by the Megara decree, that attacks on Potidaea cease at once, and that the independence of Aegina Island be respected.

The League assembly was scheduled for 432/431 BC, 'the 14th year of the Thirty Years Peace'. It was not war yet. This is specified. But the allies who called the League to convene at Sparta intended it should be, and their *hegemon* was gearing up to make it real too. They had sent to Delphi to get celestial approval while the more prosaic business of summoning their League partners was got underway. The Peloponnesian League had been functioning well for over three quarters of a century under a leadership imposed on its constituent parts. At the end of the 600s a powerful Sparta had finally established control of the resources of Messene, and, flexing her new muscles, aided Corinth and Elis to rid themselves of their tyrants. Then Argos, her main rival, was suppressed, and border wars gained her a position of supremacy over the likes of Tegea. This cemented her place as peninsula leader and raised the League as the institution to sustain this.

Now, sleek and affluent envoys from the member states with their attendants travelled the roads of the Peloponnese to the undistinguished city of Sparta, or docked at the ports of Laconia. Diplomats were always likely to be better-off types, who could fund some of their own expenses, and had been able to afford a rhetorical education that was felt crucial on these occasions. These representatives, gathering under the sun in the Eurotas valley, came from most of the states of the League, each one bound individually by treaty to Sparta even if not generally to each other. Some did not have far to come, like the Tegeans whose city was an early adherent and lay under thirty miles to the north. Others came from all over the peninsula: from communities in the north like Sicyon and Epidaurus, from Elis in the west, from Mantinea and other Arcadian towns, from

Orneae or Phlius situated between Corinth and Argos. This latter and the Achaean towns, except for Pellene, were the only real peninsular standouts against Spartan hegemony. Other members were mainlanders like the Boeotians, Locrians, Phocians and even people from Corinthian colonies in Ambracia and the islands such as Leucas and Anactorium. On top were those already highlighted, geographic outsiders but neighbours, Megara and Aegina. They were both in terror of the growing power of next-door Athens. The convocation must have numbered in hundreds, with the senior men mostly finding comfortable lodgings with friends in town, while the lesser lights and servitors in the retinues had to make do with taverns or even camping in the city's open spaces.

These League get-togethers were not so frequent, and perhaps this lack of routine goes some way to explain why a number of members were not present, though most of the important ones attended. The Corinthians were certainly there. They would again be the leaders in the rhetorical charge to war, and, as second only to Sparta in power, they had to be listened to. Also, they had not left it until the meeting to make their case. We know they had sent persuasive men to visit most League allies to canvass support well before the full body gathered. But they allowed the rest to speak first before their advocates pressed the case at the end. This time there was no criticism of the *hegemon*. They recognised that the Spartans had been diligent in sending to Delphi for a go ahead for war, given on condition they fought with all their might and main. Boosted by this surprisingly unenigmatic response from the Pythia, the Corinthians had the articulacy of men speaking to a 'house' that was already with them. They stressed this conflict would not be a small local matter between balanced powers, but that it would be a Greek World War. It would determine all their futures. They argued hard to bring on board communities they knew would perceive no direct threat from Athens, inland places with no fear of enemy fleets cruising their shores. To these they said that if they did not clip Athenians wings now then it would be too late after the maritime members of the League had been suppressed and enemy came for them. They said that an over-mighty Athens could hurt even those they could not easily reach, by denying imports from abroad.

They asserted that the allies had nothing to fear but fear itself, and that the Athenians would collapse after one defeat at sea. She might be stronger than any one individually but together they could defeat



an enemy who otherwise would become 'a dictator state'. Glib assurances were given that Delian tributaries would revolt with the least encouragement, and that Athenian imperial power was a hollow edifice to be blown down. It would be a shame on their honour if they did not have the will to mobilise the finances of their own league sufficient to counter what members of the Delian League contributed to sustain their own slavery. They painted themselves as victims of aggression by a delinquent power, but who had confidence that, as the better men with better armies, they could together pay back their tormentor. Even at sea, they believed funds could be accrued to suborn Athens' foreign sailors by offering higher rates of pay, and with time they could improve their own skills at naval warfare while the Athenians, however long they tried, could never match their Spartan-led superiority in hoplite warfare. This hints that, already, even those most enthusiastic for combat had an understanding that the war would in the end need to be won at sea, though not that it would take near a quarter of a century to achieve it. Immediately, they urged help for Potidaea, a Dorian city plagued by Ionians, and that the declaration of war should be made instantly so as to be in time to bring succour to that besieged community. To fail to do so, to not act would only weaken them further. If they wanted the peace of security then they would have to fight for it, and to fight now. Importantly for people steeling their nerves for war, the news from Delphi, that the gods were on their side, was bound to trump any doubts about being the first to break the Thirty Years Peace.

Agreement was reached to take the ultimate step but it was done with circumspection. Most at the meeting accepted that they needed time to prepare for a struggle with an opponent like the Athenians, though whether they realised it would be almost a year before it came to full-scale fighting is moot. There had been a number of missions sent to Athens to discuss the flashpoints since the Corinthians first tried to mobilise for war, and while the discussions had been difficult both sides had seemed to be at least to some degree amenable. But now the tone changed as three men, Melesippus, Ramphias and Agesander brought an ultimatum with the one demand that the Delian League be dismantled. The response when envoys arrived at Athens after the first Spartan Assembly shows an administration led by Pericles that had a good idea that war was coming. The people who had intervened in Corcyra and were intimidating Potidaea were not afraid of it, perhaps even wanted war if they could have it on their own terms. Pericles himself, who had put such an effort into

beautifying the city in the 440s, had in the 430s, spent his time and energy on preparations for a half-expected conflict with Sparta. This Attic polity had great things to live up to. Their ancestors had been the men of Marathon and Salamis, and the current generation were not inclined to fail the test when it came knocking. And there was a revanchist element too. Before the peace that ended the first Peloponnesian war Athens had a pretty dominant position in both Megara and Boeotia, and if possible she wanted this back.

Pericles, in his mid sixties, might have seen the benefits of fighting, to ensure the people kept tight to his strategy of defence and attrition, knowing as he did from the last war what might happen if the Athenians committed themselves to a fight in the open outside the long walls. In that conflict both sides had shown great belligerence at times. The Athenians had tried a strategy of gung ho aggression, and the failure of that was undoubtedly behind Pericles' idea for fighting the great war to come. The city leadership he headed had been making practical plans. The key was the fleet, 300 good triremes in the dockyards of Piraeus, bolstered by older ships and those their allies might provide. And they had the money to back them up. In 431 BC the city's annual income was about 1,000 talents, 400 from internal taxes while 600 came from tribute and other miscellaneous dues. There was plenty in reserve too. There were 6,000 talents of coined monies held in the Acropolis treasury and 500 talents and more of uncoined precious metals at other temples. It is even recorded that forty talents could be got from melting down the gold plate on Athena's statue if push came to shove. This was expected to fund, for some years, the strategy Pericles saw as the way to win the war. This was a strategy of refusing to come out and fight, to defend the city walls, and bring in sufficient food to the harbour at Piraeus to keep the population, brought in from the country, well fed. This wait-and-see policy was intended to wear down an enemy who, already to a degree split on the desirability of war, would be frustrated by the refusal to fight it out in the open. This enemy had little capacity to carry the walls or effectively establish a blockade. Pericles could well have based his calculations on the 1,500–2,000 talents a year the war with Samos had cost between 440 and 439 BC, and the Athenian leader was confident the funds would last long enough to exhaust his enemies' resolve. All these well-founded plans would be opposed by an enemy whose backward economy was just not fitted to fight a long war, a long way from home, and who could field hardly more than 100 warships, mostly those the Corinthians built for the Corcyra

conflict, and whose fiscal plans depended on getting loans from the temple depositaries at Olympia and Delphi that, even if possible, might well smack of impiety.

In this context, it is hardly surprising that the official Athenian reply gave no satisfaction to the visiting envoys. The response to the ultimatum, however contumelious it was, remained judicious, that they should try arbitration again. This was never going to be enough, yet, still, when the Spartan three took the road back home swords had still not quite been drawn. It is arguable that, even then, there was an opportunity for peace, and perhaps a level of interstate incompetence was part of it not being achieved. There had been unforeseen factors all along. For one, Pericles had thought he could isolate Corinth in the negotiations but by trying to do so he only strengthened the hands of the hawks in Sparta. There were people there who were not sure, not absolutely convinced of an Attic devastation strategy. They had inklings that to win the war would be a huge and difficult undertaking. But what seems the case on both sides was that the majority, as they argued the toss, were just buying time to prepare for a conflict they had already decided on. Certainly, many trumpeted their chances. Peloponnesian strategists particularly did not expect the Athenians to be able to hold out for more than a few years. They were not stupid. They knew the strength of the city's defences and the resources of the Delian League, but still they could not conceive of a people being prepared to allow their country to be devastated repeatedly without coming out to fight. Such would be an aberrant, unthinkable policy, and when the Athenians came out to engage in battle the edge the Spartan army had over any other surely promised victory.

Would it be war or not? A botched and bloody attempted coup by the Thebans at Plateau made clear that it would. This curtain raiser saw Theban soldiers attacking Athens' ally under an officer called Eurymachus, whose father Leontiades had surrendered his Theban troops to the Persians to escape being massacred with the Spartans at Thermopylae in 480 BC, and whose own involvement in this enterprise ended in indecorous death. The Athenians responded by detaining Boeotian nationals in Attica where they were arrested in a job lot as the administration sent out to find friends in the coming conflict. The Athenians even contacted their old foes the Persians and other non Hellenes in the hope of garnering money and auxiliaries while trying to sign up allies in Cephalaria, Zacynthus and Acarnania.

These represented significant bases to threaten the western seaways round the Peloponnese. It was telling that it was Thebes that commenced the fighting. As close neighbour of Athens, she had most to lose, and also much to gain, so could not delay in the way the slow-coach Spartans could. These key warriors did eventually make a move, after rallying assured confederates and others they hoped to have on side. Some optimists even anticipated their friends in Italy and Sicily would eventually contribute 500 ships to their navy. This predictably did not materialise but on land a military push was soon impressively underway. The year 431 BC saw their first act of war when two-thirds of the Peloponnesian League levy gathered at the Isthmus of Corinth. King Archidamus was in command despite his reputation as a peace man, having a history of good relations with Pericles, and only recently having bad-mouthed the Corinthians for their poor show at Corcyra and Potidaea against the very people he was now about to attack. But there was no real option as the other king, Pleistoanax, was in exile, accused of taking Athenian bribes way back in 445 BC, and his son, Pausanias, was too young, and the uncle, Cleomenes, only regent.

The king may have had doubts about the war but once underway he knew what he had to do. He prepared his men with an address that seems strangely out of character for his people. He dwelt at some length on what was expected of the veteran army he commanded, telling them to live up to their reputation, to be cautious and disciplined as they entered the country of a formidable enemy who would pull out all the stops to forestall them. Having unburdened himself, this still reluctant warrior, perhaps on his own initiative rather than under instructions, sent Melesippus again to see if the prospect of immanent Armageddon might have brought the offending Athenians round. But they would not listen, and returned the herald, a protected man, ensuring he made no contact with anybody before being escorted out of town. A rebuff but one at least that allowed the blame for war to be thrust onto delinquent Athenians shoulders, even if those contending this knew at heart that their Theban auxiliaries had already broken whatever shreds of peace that had remained at Plataea.

Archidamus, having taken up the baton of command, folded the public tent, and led tens of thousands of men down the invasion road to Attica. After passing through friendly Megara, Oenoe fort on the Athenian Boeotian border was the first target. It was well positioned

to dominate one of the passes through the mountains that defined Attica's northern borders. Control here ensured communication with their Theban allies whose cavalry they needed to supplement an arm they were weak in. As May ended, the invaders got down to business, entering and trashing the farmlands in the Eleusian and Thracian plains in western Attica, before moving on to camp further east in the lands of Acharnae Deme, one of the administrative divisions of Attica. This actually turned out to be the end. Much was left untouched, and this may have been intended in furtherance of a strategy that saw keeping good acres undamaged as a benefit, so the Athenians were not left as completely desperate foes with nothing left to lose. This idea of leaving farmland unwrecked, treating it as a form of hostage, had been suggested by Archidamus before, and clearly he still had hopes that such pressure might force a compromise on the Athenian landholders in the Assembly. The partial intrusion had not been altogether without problems. Enemy horsemen had made things difficult, hovering on the wings of the invaders, and making the difficult task of agricultural demolition even more onerous. There was little more that was vulnerable to a swift and agile horseman than some out-of-formation forager caught on his own or in a small group hacking down olive trees or burning and dismantling farm buildings or the less scrupulous even looting the Deme town temples. But the Boeotian cavalry had helped, and the Peloponnesians had the satisfaction of seeing a good proportion of the enemies' best land and rural building ending as charred ruins and barren waste.

The Spartans had been in no rush to leave their comfort zone south of the Isthmus. Indeed, it had been almost a year between the vote for war and the first invasion of Attica, but when it arrived the Periclean strategy faced its test. The Athenian leader had persuaded his countrymen to refuse to face the invaders. To have accepted battle would have played into the hands of these masters of hoplite war. It would be better, instead, to utilise their command of the sea to replace the harvests the enemy might destroy with imported corn, brought safely up from the Piraeus between the long walls to the city markets.

But it was not without much soul searching and, indeed, complaint after the fact, for the landowners felt it keenly, and the old aristocrats the most, not having silver mines, slaves for hire or manufactory to fall back on. And these men remained crucial whatever the constitutional changes of the last half century. With survival secured this way, Pericles' intention was to outwait an enemy they could not

beat in the open field. He banked on the peace party in Sparta regaining confidence as the war failed to bring forth a swift resolution. The fact that the Athenians did not respond strongly to Peloponnesian aggression was all part of this. Attacking Sparta and her allies, Pericles worried, might not only be ineffective, in the light of the fact that Argos her only potential ally in the Peloponnese was out of the picture having signed a 30-year truce with Sparta, but also might harden anti-Athenian attitudes amongst those who were hurting. He hoped this restraint would encourage the Spartan doves to persuade their more bellicose colleagues to make an early return to the peace table.

But if Pericles had persuaded his fellow citizens of his policy still his passive line caused concern. The hoplite class as well as the aristocrats hurt when they saw their farms go up in smoke and the mariners and trireme captains, inevitably, were inclined to flex their muscles, to exhibit those skills in battle they had trained so hard to attain in the past few years. Fortunately, he was in a position to defuse things to a considerable extent, by circumventing any call for convening the Assembly. Most of the generals named in 431 BC were his men, and if technically the Prytany, a steering committee of the city council, controlled the process then his authority could pretty much ensure against a hostile meeting being summoned, particularly when so many citizens would be on duty guarding the walls. There is plenty to show the pressure at this time, an ample number of rivals manoeuvring against him, with comedians like Hermippus in 'The Fates' having a fierce Cleon biting at Pericles for showing himself insufficiently pugnacious. Plutarch also introduces this same man we will hear much of later as one of many snapping at the heels of the great man as he tried to hold his well-thought-out but deeply unpopular line. With flames visible from the walls, and the refugees from the country finding miserable billets on derelict lots, between the defensive walls and even in religious precincts, it was necessary to act, and for a naval power like Athens to raid the enemy coast was bound to look like the optimal option. But if the authorities were to unleash the navy, as much as anything to boost morale at home, then there were practical reasons to do it soon. To be at their most effective, the raiders needed to strike before the end of June when the corn would have been cut and easy to destroy but not yet gathered in for protection.

The task force that took to the sea was made up of 100 Athenian triremes, later joined by fifty more from Corcyra, allies appreciative of

the help they had so recently received at Sybota. These vessels crossed the Saronic gulf, rounding the Agolid to reach Acte on the border between Argos and Laconia. They 'sent up the farm buildings in flames'. in retaliation for what had so recently been done to their own country. Then, the enthusiastic marauders cruised the east coast of the Peloponnese, before passing the southern shore of the peninsula, coasting about Melea point between the island of Cythera and the mainland; then past Cape Matapan, old Taenaron, the most southerly point of the whole Balkan mainland, before coming through the Oenussae islands passage. From there, they aimed for the far side of the most westerly of the three southern headlands of the peninsula, where Methone stands and, once nearby, they landed on beaches not far from the town.

A second-century AD tourist tells us a little about this place, apparently called Pedasos before the Trojan War. The locals told a story that its current appellation came from the daughter of Oineus, a Calydonian king of legendary times, best known for the heroes who came to help rid him of a dangerous boar. But Pausanias finally proposed that the rock that stands at the mouth of the harbour gave it the name Methone. It was famous for its Temple to Athena of the Winds, and a sanctuary to Artemisia, where people mixed local water with pitch to make a kind of healing ointment. Yet it would not be a lucky place, and, not long in the future, crafty pirates from Illyria kidnapped a large part of the population. The Athenians threatening the town numbered 1,000 hoplites, 400 archers as well as the marines from the Corcyrian ships. These, with the sailors who could be spared, landed, burning and looting as they moved in open order towards Methone. The raiders had not experienced much opposition so far and had no reason to expect much in this out-of-the way corner of the Spartan world. But they were about to come across a man who would become an important participant in the first part of the Peloponnesian War. Brasidas was the officer on hand, and he gathered together sufficient men, including 100 hoplites, to allow him to act. Leading his small troop hell for leather to get into the town, he caused carnage on the way by pouncing on numbers of the disorderly invaders who had spread over the country to cut the town off and find what pickings they could. Many of these looters, only interested in what they could find and expecting no opposition, put up hardly any fight when they found an organized body come to chivvy them. Brasidas, after this satisfactory retribution, made it to Methone with few casualties. Once arrived, he distributed his men round the ramparts to keep the

intruders out. The defences were pretty makeshift when he got there. It did not yet have the secure fortifications built there a century later, but he used what little time he had to get the inhabitants and the few soldiers with him to patch up any obvious gaps.

Realising that the defenders were not in great force, the Athenian hoplites, with archers and sailors as auxiliaries, quickly got themselves organized, and established siege lines around the place. But they found the defenders, despite being badly outnumbered, brilliantly led. Their attempts at assault were thrown back wherever they tried them, and soon the attackers became so frustrated, and worried that more enemies might be on their way, that they decided to pack up what loot they had taken and re-embark on board the ships. This may have been a minor episode but it is reported not only that the invaders slunk away stymied of their prey but that Brasidas as defender gained a name as the first real Spartan hero of a war just begun. His success looked even rosier in the light of damage done elsewhere. This was not only before they turned against Methone but after too, when the Athenians descended on Elis. There, they stormed the port of Pheia, gave a bloody nose to the defence force and wrecked widespread destruction before a major local mobilisation meant they had to withdraw. Then they struck at Corinthian holdings in Acarnania, drafting the town of Astacus into the Delian League after driving out a local tyrant. Following which, they rested at the island of Cephalonia, enforcing the allegiance of the people there, and then turning for home.

In fact, it had been bad news for Sparta across the board. The Athenian general, Cleopompus, had been campaigning in central Greece at the same time, roughing up Spartan allies like the Locrians, and showing how little they could do to help friends in need. There had been other reasons for the direction of this campaigning too. It was important to keep Euboea safe as pasture for the Athenians displaced flocks of sheep and oxen, and as refuge for her people as well, a matter significant to enough to get a mention in the theatre.<sup>2</sup> This was serious enough, as was ensuring communications with Thessaly, whose cavalry they hoped to employ, to leave a garrisoned fort behind on a convenient desert island. Also, by taking hostages from some coastal towns, the Athenians kept a handle on people who otherwise might have rallied round for Sparta. And these busy months had also seen the locals driven off Aegina and Athenian colonists substituted for old rivals who ended dispersed as refuges in Thyrea on



the Peloponnesian coast between Sparta and Argos, or anywhere they could find a sanctuary. The final thrust had been descent on Megara by a huge force comprising the returning fleet and one of the biggest armies the Athenians ever mobilised in the whole war. These were hard knocks, and it is no wonder Brasidas' achievements were lauded in the balance against them. He got a vote of thanks from the state, to become 'the first officer who obtained this notice during the war'. It was a real acclamation but it was only the first of many achievements by this remarkable Spartan.

A Sicilian, writing several centuries later, claims Brasidas as still a youth on his first appearance at Methone, but this is surely not possible because of the strict socialisation all Spartans were made to endure. It was generally only the Royal family where exceptions were made, as when Pausanias took command of the army at Plataea when still in his early twenties. Even after young Spartans entered their twentieth year, despite joining the army, they did not become full assembly-attending citizens. That did not happen until age thirty, when they finally gained full citizen's rights, able to vote in great assembly matters, hold office and be permitted to marry. Given this rigid schedule and traditional Spartan adherence to the rules, it is very difficult to see Brasidas receiving responsibility at any level of provincial defence before at least that age. So it is not a youth, but a man in his prime, who must be imagined, probably in his middle thirties, who had been through all the stages of Spartan education and thoroughly socialised in the mores of that extraordinary society. Only after some years of war and the casualties and stresses that had taken their toll, would such a breach of the norms be possible, to fill casual military vacancies with younger men. Indeed later in his own career Brasidas would encounter just such individuals sent out as officers on campaign at a much earlier age than tradition demanded. But surely this would not have happened as early as the first year of conflict.

One thing we know about this new hero is that he would have, when seven years old, have left his family home to enter the *agoge*, the unique Spartan educational experience. Every full Spartiate male child, apart from the heirs to the two thrones, went through this gruelling process. In the next thirteen years of his life he would have gone shoeless to harden and make him a surer-footed soldier, and been given just sufficient food to keep body and soul together to ensure he became a well-built man, without any excess fat. This would also have encouraged him to forage and steal when necessary, the

only sin being getting caught. With only a cloak in all seasons and a bed of river reeds, luxury was to have thistledown added for warmth in winter. He would have been toughened in a way brutal to modern sensibilities but that achieved its end. The aim was to produce iron-hard soldiers with an unbreakable esprit de corps, making the Spartan army almost indestructible in battle. The *agoge* consciously aped the techniques of animal herding with the specific intention of crushing the individual will, and younger boys were bossed by boys a few years older. They lived a harsh life comprising military training and stealing to live. From the age of seven, it was bigotry, bullying, constant supervision and, most of all, competition. Military cohorts replaced family as the prime centre of loyalty and affection, and bonds were often strengthened by physical intimacy that created an institutionalised bond important both socially and politically in later life. Xenophon, a later Laconophile Athenian, who sent his own sons through the institution, contrasts the *agoge* that produced hardy spare men, able to work and fight with little food, with the soft, well-shod, well-fed children in other states with their tutors and day schools.

Competition insinuated every aspect of life, from military practice to choral singing. Every moment was an examination, every activity a contest, to ensure the final test of manhood was passed, when they stood shoulder to shoulder beside their comrades in the crucible of battle. The ferocious and conformist life style must have wearied the psyche, but it certainly produced soldiers happy to die for Sparta. Plutarch tells us that when, as young adults, three would be chosen, to then pick 100 supporters, these groups would contend at every opportunity, often ending fighting each other. If an outsider tried to stop a brawl, the *ephors* could institute a fine. As a boy, Brasidas would have walked in the shadow of the Persian colonnade under the sculptures of Mardonius and Artemisia amongst other Persians and their allies from the Xerxes war. These held the roof up of this covered way leading to the market dedicated to Pythian Apollo, where fighting-age boys took part in the naked war dances. These sacred ceremonies, begun way back in the seventh century, combined to call on the gods for both good harvests and success in war, where individual dancers might win sickles as prizes for the best performance.

Brasidas as a young man would have experienced plenty of the institutionalised barbarity in the *agoge* schooling. He would have stood the flogging test and played mayhem games at the sanctuary of

Artemis Orthia. Virtually nothing stands today at this cult centre situated east from the market place past the acropolis, reached by the Tripoli road, and a half-hour walk out of town. Unfathomably old, it had been the home of a wooden effigy of grim repute.<sup>3</sup>, <sup>3a</sup>, <sup>3b</sup> This represented a winged goddess who had previously demanded human sacrifice but had been tamed by Lycurgus into only requiring the blood resulting from the flagellation of Spartan boys who ran a gauntlet of their peers with whips to steal the cheeses that were piled on the altar. This, like so much of the Classical Greek world, would turn into fodder for Roman tourists in centuries to come, but in Brasidas' day it retained that mixture of the sacred and practical so typical of both the *agoge* and the whole society. Bloody and brutal games between teams of young men were designed to engender group cooperation and incredible hardihood. This rough stuff continued until a young Spartan man's twentieth year, when he joined that key foundation of his life, the army. Here he would become part of a small mess of comrades where, if the accounts are to be believed, eating broth made of pigs' blood, and the institutional degrading of drunken helots, were the norm. Undoubtedly it was more than this, because, even if their upbringing was savage, they were still Greeks with traditions of a cultural life albeit one tainted by xenophobia and philistinism.

Whether Brasidas was involved in murderous, institutional culls of helots carried out by a group of the very best *agoge* graduates, called the Crypteia, we do not know. But the existence of this practice illustrates how fear of the helots they oppressed was at the core of the people's consciousness. Nor do we know whether he married, but it is surely likely, as not to have done so would have been remarked upon. As to siring children, none are known, and the length of time he spent away from home must have lowered the odds of this to some extent. The importance of procreation at Sparta ensured a somewhat better life for women than in most other Greek societies. They were allowed to participate in public physical exercise, an exclusively-male preserve elsewhere. This would make them strong, healthy, future mothers. This led to salacious gossip about their loose morals being common across the rest of Greece. Married women also could have great power in the family, and even in public affairs, when their men folk were away on campaign. They could even be granted property rights, a fact that is claimed in a few generations' time to have concentrated much landed property in the hands of widows. But these ideas included little of domestic bliss, and even married life frequently consisted of occasional and often clandestine visits to the marriage bed. And if

these social norms were intended to encourage procreation by piquing sexual interest, it must have concomitantly discouraged it by the lack of the frequency of contact.

It is unusual to have much of a clue to the appearance of important men in old Sparta. There are none of those busts like those that can be attributed, more or less convincingly, to some of the great men of Athens. All we have are reasonable assumptions that Brasidas would have had little spare flesh, as the *agoge* did not produce fatties. Our Spartan is unlikely to have been tall. Skeletal remains show most ancient Greeks were generally not much above five and half feet. His hair would have been worn long with a beard, as the Spartans considered this made a good-looking man more handsome and an ugly man more terrifying, and as he was in his prime it was probably still the usual black or dark brown hair of his people. By 430 BC these features of Brasidas would have been becoming known in his community. He was someone people would have pointed to as a coming man as he took his place in the early summer crowds going to Amyclae, the old Mycenaean capital of Laconia, for the Hycanthia festival. This comprised three days of frugal celebration at a village about three miles to the south of Sparta, where now many orange orchards grow. Plain bread and little pomp was the order on the first day to commemorate the death of the hero Hyacinthus, a boy beautiful enough to be loved by both Apollo and the West wind. The second heralded a sort of resurrection, with choirs singing in praise of Apollo, horse races and a parade of carts decorated by the women and girls. We are told foreigners and even helots could participate<sup>4</sup> up to that point, though the third day was presumably more exclusive, entailing as it did what seems to have been some form of mystery cult. Brasidas may even have had some official part to play, as there is a hint that he had become one of Sparta's governing circle. Apparently, in recognition of his defence of Methone, not only had he been given popular recognition but had received another accolade, which brought power as well as fame. He was named the eponymous *ephor*, one of those five key officials who the year was named for in the official chronology. These executives were elected by the citizen assembly, and had extraordinary judicial and punitive powers, able to fine anybody on the spot, to prefer charges against other magistrates and even depose a king every few years if their star gazing supported the case. These despots for a year did not, like everyone else, have to stand when a king entered the room, and it is said when they swore an oath it was for the state while if a king did so it was just for him.

They supervised the *agoge*, and called out the levy for war, requisitioning the support services, baggage carts and animals. Two of them often went with the king on campaign as commissars.

As the war, in which Brasidas had so distinguished himself, progressed into its second full year, it would not be swords, spears and slingshot that caused deaths, so much as bacteria brought in on grain ships docking at the Piraeus. A contemporary writer claims the epidemic had come from Ethiopia, and it hit the island of Lemnos before arriving in Attica. Nobody is clear exactly what the contagion was, but it was certainly deadly, making off with a considerable proportion of the Athenian population and, no respecter of boundaries, caused an amount of carnage in the Peloponnese and Sparta as well. It had come to the Attic city early in the summer of 430 BC, after King Archidamus had, for a second time, led a League army deep into the country, wrecking as they went, and forcing the population off their farms and back into the city. There are stories of terror and moral decline in this period of huge stress. These show how the imagination of the populace was affected. But still, how much the deaths, by disease or battle or the destruction of the land, really affected the direction of the war is hotly debated. Pericles, who himself would soon become a victim of the plague, was not dragged from his course, and he kept his people to the strategy of refusing battle and waiting out the invaders.

The Spartans intruded further east and south on their second invasion, damaging some of the best of the city's agricultural acres, and reaching Laurium, where the crucial silver mines were situated, but still the city leaders kept a lid on those who wanted to pick up their spears and shields to face up to the invader. But as in the previous year, absolute passivity was not an option, and again a raiding task force was prepared. It was 100 ships again, but four times as many hoplites and cavalry instead of archers. The now-experienced raiders realised these troopers could spread mayhem further and more effectively than their footslogging comrades. Fifty more ships came from the island allies of Chios and Lesbos to boost the numbers, and with these they ploughed a not dissimilar furrow to the year before. First it was the cities of the east Agolid, Epidaurus and Troezen that suffered, then the east shore of the Peloponnese where they sacked Prasiae on the Laconian coast. But if the sailors who joined the armament at Zea harbour had faced none of the kind of opposition that Brasidas had offered the year before, they had brought other

enemies on board with them, plague germs that cut a swath amongst the complement of the fleet. After turning for home, they returned in time to find the Peloponnesian invaders already marching away, understandably eager to depart a country ravaged by a contagious pestilence.

The plague affected the Athenians in a way none of the enemies' actions had. Their spirit was, if not broken, stretched to an agonising tautness. Cowering behind city walls in squalor, watching the enemy wreck havoc on their homeland, did not sit comfortably, and however much clout Pericles had with the people, what he asked of them was always going to be difficult to swallow. It may be at this time that his party began to be a failing one, and control briefly slipped, an episode reported by a later biographer but not by our contemporary source. We also learn of a chasm in confidence that affected the city authorities at this time. A peace delegation was outfitted, with a herald to provide protection in hostile country, and sent to Sparta. But it was fruitless. Insufficient blood had flown to grease the wheels of compromise. And neither a push for peace, nor the sight of plague victims dying in squalid shanties thrown up between the long walls, was enough to scuttle every project. There were generals wanting to make a name who were able to get men to follow them, and the Athenians at this time ratcheted up both their military and diplomatic commitments in the north. Their opponents were not inactive either. The Spartans had a swipe at Athens' allies on Zacynthus islands, and there were stirrings on the western march that would bring in a man whose achievements would directly involve Brasidas in active campaigning again.

## *Chapter Three*

### **An Athenian Admiral**

Phormio had been a significant man in the Athenian firmament for decades. He was perhaps a little younger than Pericles. These Athenians were not rushers into matrimony, and he must have been near to sixty in 428 BC for his son to already have been chosen general, a post with a minimum age requirement of thirty. From the evidence he seems to have been a Pericles man as he is mentioned as a general in 440/439 BC during the conflict with Samos. These people, having bested the Milesians over the control of Priene, found themselves confronted by the Athenians who the defeated party had brought into the war. The Samians were forced to accept an Athenian-sponsored democracy but, soon after, the old guard, with Persian backing and the help of 700 mercenaries, took back control of the island. This refusal to cow-tow to imperial Athens struck a chord at Byzantium too, where the people also joined the revolt. But it soon became clear that these two communities had bitten off a deal more than they could chew. Sixty Athenian ships were sent to suppress the insurgency, but this turned out to be only the first round of a contest that saw Pericles trounce an enemy fleet returning from the Asian mainland. This commenced a siege that took nine months to conclude; on one occasion, Pericles was drawn off to Caria to face a Persian fleet from Phoenicia that he had incorrectly been informed was on its way to raise the siege. It was after Pericles had returned to Samos to reinstate the blockade, when Phormio arrived, along with major reinforcements from not only Athens but Chios and Lesbos as well. With these new entrants, the odds were just too great, and both the delinquent cities surrendered.

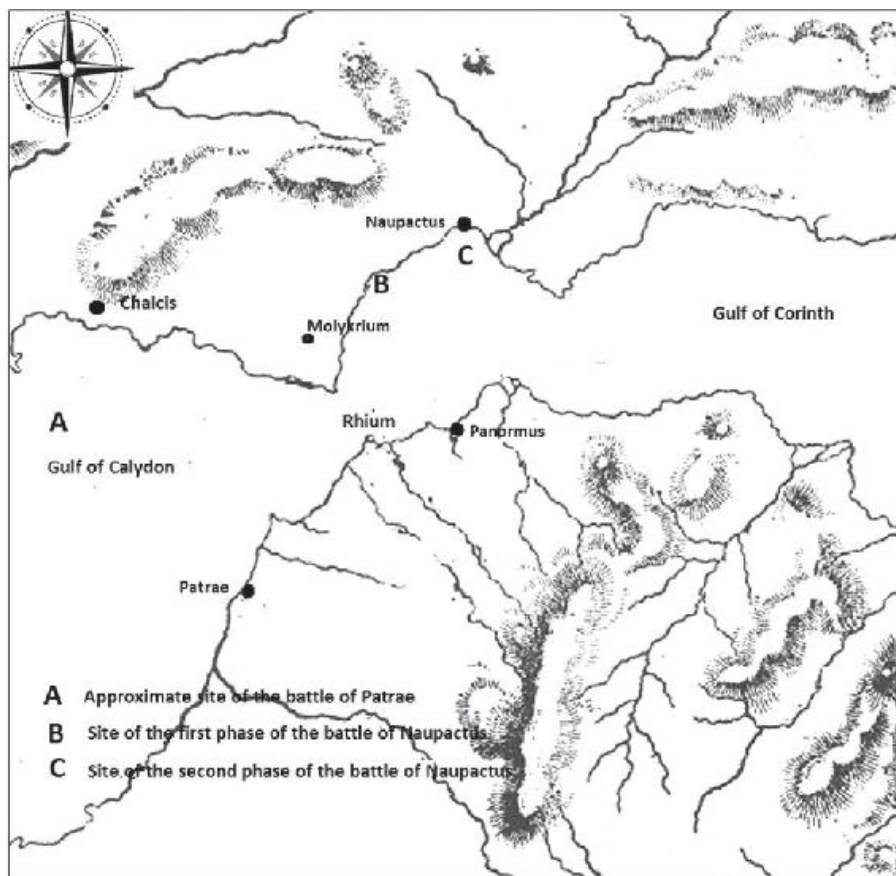
This significant lieutenant of Pericles had a pretty extraordinary reputation, with playwrights lauding his hard living and integrity:

‘Ah! God grant we may see the blessed day. I have suffered so much; have so oft slept with Phormio on hard beds ...’<sup>1</sup>

They picture him admirably sober and frugal, training Dionysius, a god but untutored in military skills. Although his sobriety was lauded the sentiment perhaps says more about most other people’s belief in the heartening effects of alcohol, particularly before combat. The reality was substantial too. Apart from Samos he had been heavily

involved in the war against Potidaea. In 432 BC it was his army that finally isolated the city by investing its southern side, and so cutting it off from the Chalcidian promontory of Pellene, and he had done some hard campaigning in tandem with the Macedonians as well. But it was an operation a couple of years later that saw this old soldier really come to the fore. It was the third summer of the war, and at Athens plague was raging. Pericles would succumb to it soon. Spartan-led armies had been raiding Attica without significant opposition, yet from one viewpoint Athens' situation looked quite rosy. Pericles' strategy was showing solid. After the opposition of the first year there had been few problems within the ranks of her allies, except in the Chalcidice and, even there, progress had been made, with the long siege of Potidaea about to come to a successful conclusion. Also, Athenian ability to hit back at her enemies had been explored over these years with an invasion of the Megarid, raids in Laconia, Messene and the Agolid. But these had been pin pricks. It had remained the classic asymmetrical contest between a sea and a land power, and, in these circumstances, both sides had inevitably looked about for different arenas in which to take the fight to their enemy.





**Map 4: Phormio's Battles.**

It was to the west that eyes strayed. Acarnania was part of the rugged western wall of the Greek mainland, with a very defensible coast line and outlying barbicans, like the island of Leucas and her smaller neighbours. To the north, it was bounded by the Ambracian gulf that indents deep into the centre of Greece from the Ionian Sea, and to the south and east by Aetolia. These were regions where, for centuries, the people had indulged in the kind of local rivalries that were typical of inter-state relations in most parts of Greece. At some point in time, a hotspot had emerged around Amphilochian Argos. This city lay just to the east of the Ambracian gulf shore. It was another place founded by the Corinthians in the seventh century on the River Arachthos where the waters were still navigable and serviced a hinterland rich in natural resources. This affluent community had attracted the cupidity of ambitious Ambraciots who had taken over, thrown out the inhabitants and colonised it themselves. The people, now refugees, called on the Acarnanians for help, and this community, perturbed by Ambraciot expansion, asked

for assistance from the Athenians. The man the city sent was Phormio. The old man may have just returned from the north, and hardly had time to enjoy the pleasures of home life, when he was dispatched at the head of thirty triremes to make an impact in the west. He did not let the grass grow, circumnavigating the Peloponnese, and cruising through the Gulf of Ambracia, he no sooner arrived than he stormed Argos, enslaved the Ambraciots he found there, and returned control to the old inhabitants and their Acarnanian sponsors. It should be noted, for completeness, that some people contend the whole Amphilochian-Argos show should be placed decades earlier in the 450s, when Pericles and Phormio, in tandem, are reported pulling imperial muscle in the region.<sup>2</sup>

This intervention, whenever it occurred, firmed up an Athenian-Acarnanian affection that would last, but it had far from totally solved the local problem in the west. The Ambraciots had only waited for the overweening Athenian presence to recede over the horizon before they were back, this time seconded by auxiliary Chaoni, a Greek tribe from further up the coast. These had the capacity to destroy the country around but failed when they attempted an assault on the town defences. When news of these events became known, the Athenian authorities decided to boost their presence out in the troubled zone. Phormio was again the man called on, reasonable enough as he knew the country and the people he would have to deal with. A story exists that he had only been pulled out of retirement because those who mattered in Acarnania had asked for him personally to come to their aid. It was only at this point that his fellow citizens took notice of the retiree on the family farm, under a cloud for non payment of a fine. The hard-marching, hard-fighting old buffer found himself, once more, the flavour of the month, and the ever-imaginative Athenians found a way to funnel him public money, theoretically to make sacrifices to the gods, but actually to pay the fine that would allow him, once again, to hold public office:

‘About Phormio, however, I have a detail to add. Quite one of the best men at Athens and distinguished for the fame of his ancestors he chanced to be heavily in debt. So he withdrew to the parish (*deme*) Paeania and lived there until the Athenians elected him to command a naval expedition. But he refused the office on the ground that before his debts were discharged he lacked the spirit to face his troops. So the Athenians, who were absolutely determined to have Phormio as their commander, paid all his creditors ...’<sup>3</sup>

This time he only got twenty triremes, when, in the winter he was ordered, to go round south of the Peloponnese and into the Gulf of Corinth with a remit to defend the position there from the base at Naupactus. Control of this inlet, leading out to the Ionian Sea and deep into the heart of central Greece, was crucial for all parties in this Hellenic world war. The product of a tectonic rift it was, and indeed still is, a hotbed of seismic activity. The waterway is choked in on the west at the strait of Rion, where it is just over two miles across, though for most of its length it is much wider, even reaching thirty miles at its greatest extent. Anybody ruling the waves in this quarter had easy opportunities either to attack or to securely defend the north shore of the Peloponnese. It had been, and indeed at its eastern end still was, dominated by Corinth, with the port of Lechaëum as the key base for veteran seafarers whose trading ships and war fleets had controlled the seaway for centuries. But, with Athens grown as a maritime rival in the fifth century, things had changed, and about two miles west of the mouth of the River Mornos was the place the Athenian marine had made a home. Naupactus meant 'boatyard'. It is claimed that here, in legendary times, the descendants of Heracles built their fleet for an invasion of the Peloponnese, and, indeed, the place was a nexus of marine combat for millennia. Under its modern name of Lepanto it was the sight of the most famous galley contest of early modern times, between the Ottoman Turks and an alliance of west European powers in 1571 AD.

The town had belonged in its beginnings to Ozolian Locris, but by the 450s the Athenians had not only taken it over but they had brought in some colonists who were really dependable Sparta haters. These were Messenian exiles whose bitterness against the people who had enslaved their compatriots was legend. With them present, the Athenians had been able to construct a western naval base where they would never have to worry that the locals might go over to the Peloponnesian side. The town was situated five miles east of the north lip of the Rion mouth of the gulf, and, although the modern harbour is very small, around the bay were wide beaches with ample room for the triremes with which the Athenians hoped to control these waters. This was where Phormio was based in winter 430/429 BC to midsummer 429 BC, blockading the gulf. This was just patrol duty, not suggestive of the epic stuff to come. Naupactus was not only a prime site to control this waterway but it was also a place where Athens could affect what was going on in west central Greece, where the Spartans were looking likely to step up their involvement. With

Athenian support on offer to the Acarnanians, their enemies knew they too needed a powerful sponsor to push their cause around the Ambracian gulf. The Ambraciots still wanted Amphilocheian Argos and much more of Acarnanian country as well if they could get it, so they sent to Sparta in an effort to persuade them to dispatch help. The cooperation they were suggesting was sold by the envoys as very much in the Peloponnesians' interest. It was suggested that by threatening the Acarnania coast they would cancel that people out as a military factor. And the full proposal included the idea that if the Ambraciots could make headway on the mainland then the Spartans could take control of the big islands of Zacynthus and Cephalonia. Domination of these would make Athenian access to the Gulf of Corinth a lot more difficult, and, if things went really well, they might drive the Athenians and their Messenian friends out altogether and get their hands on Naupactus itself.

When the Authorities in the Eurotas valley took up this gage, an officer called Cnemus was given the job. He had been *navarch*, admiral, before in these waters, leading a raid on Zacynthus in 430 BC. Now with 1,000 hoplites and a few ships, he was given command of an advance guard, while the rest of the Peloponnesian navy was called to launch and rendezvous at Leucas. Cnemus must have started out from somewhere inside the Gulf of Corinth as it is specifically explained he had to give the Athenian patrols near Naupactus the slip to arrive in Ambracia, and join up with the allies. On landing, he found those who had assembled were an impressive lineup of western and northern powers. Mentioned are not only Ambraciots but Anactorians, from a city on the southern lip of the Gulf of Ambracia, Leucadians, Chaonians, Molossians and other tribes from Epirus. More than this, there were Orestians from upper Macedon, and 1,000 Macedonians sent by King Perdiccas himself, despite the fact that he was supposed to be allied to Athens at this time. But for all the noise and numbers, and despite advancing deep into Acarnania, wrecking as they went, the host did not accomplish a great deal. We do, however, hear interesting details of their order-of-march, which was spread wide apart in columns, with the barbarian warriors confident and disordered, while the Hellenes were much more professional in their demeanour, but all leaving a country smoking behind them. When this army got to the Acarnanian capital of Stratus, the Chaonian division took no care at all, and they were ambushed by the locals. The rest of the barbarians, seeing their friends in bloody ruin, fled too, and only stopped when they reached the Hellenes following them on in good

order. On them they rallied, while their pursuers also halted to wait for the rest of the Acarnanian army to arrive. This turned out to be the sum of the fighting, as the invaders, finding the defenders a tougher nut than they expected, withdrew, with their different contingents each taking the road home. This feeble outcome of what seems to have taken so much effort to get going may be explained by events happening elsewhere. The invasion had been planned to coincide with an attack by the main part of the Peloponnesian fleet against the Acarnanian coast. This aimed to keep the defenders there occupied and unable to come to the assistance of Stratos, but this side of things had not gone smoothly.

The man who stood between this well-thought plan and success was the old Athenian at Naupactus. When first the enemy threat materialized, messengers were rushed to Naupactus asking for Phormio to come directly to their aid but only to be disappointed, finding him more concerned about the menace to his own base rather than their terrors. He felt his first duty was to keep an eye on the Corinth side, and he could not leave Naupactus unguarded. It was not that he was uninterested, for he had come to try and help, but felt nothing would be to the long-term purpose if he did not keep Naupactus secure. With this caveat, he was prepared to do what he could, keeping his eyes peeled for whatever the enemy might be planning. This might have seemed something of an unsatisfactory response from an individual the Acarnanians had specifically asked to be sent as their saviour, but Phormio was not the kind of man who was really going to disappoint. And when the enemy made their move to support Cnemus he was prepared.

The commander of the Athenian Gulf of Corinth fleet of twenty triremes was well positioned as he now began a sequence of triumphs. After his death, these successes would win him a state funeral, a statue on the acropolis, inscriptions at Delphi, and a tomb standing near those of Athenian greats like Pericles, Thrasybulus and Chabrias on the road to where Plato's Academy would be situated in later years. Now, in summer 429 BC, he would face a Peloponnesian enemy showing high ambitions, whose hopes of overrunning Acarnania, and taking over the islands of Zacynthus and Cephalonia, had become very real. These landlubbers were beginning to wrestle with the problem of how to wrest control of the sea from the Athenians, so to get their hands on the key landfalls on the western islands and mainland was an obvious ploy. When they showed their hand, the direction of sail

made it clear that the people in Acarnania had been right to be concerned when they requested Phormio to help them. A large Peloponnesian fleet, after leaving the ports round Corinth, had hugged the south shore of the gulf, keeping near the friendly Achaean side before passing Rhium and reaching the open sea. The next step was to cross the water of the Gulf of Calydon, then north to the coast of Acarnania, and the officers in command knew that this was when the enterprise really became risky, entailing leaving the protection of a friendly shore.

The Peloponnesians anticipated trouble from an enemy admiral who, if he had seen through their plans, might try to intercept them on their way to join Cnemus on the western front. Standing on his quarterdeck, in the summer heat, Phormio had indeed taken stock of the news of his enemies' movements. And he had planned his response knowing that he was in command of a small but handy squadron of warships, and that the men who manned them were the most expert seamen in the Greek world. The key, even in these heroic days, was money, and the income Athens had from her League meant she could keep large numbers of ships at sea for a long time. This meant that the crews had time to hone the skills that made them so formidable. Phormio had already shadowed his enemies' line of sail and moved his base to just outside the mouth of the gulf, to be on hand to fight the enemy in open waters where he could expect to get the best out of his ships and men. Situated where they were, the Athenian vessels were able to look after Naupactus but still be poised to help the Acarnanians, by standing sentinel against any enemy trying to land on their coast. Not that this kind of naval interdiction was easy in ancient times, because triremes typically required beaching every night so were easy to evade by a dextrous opponent. But what this particular squadron had going for them was that if it came to a fight in the open waters outside the gulf then the extra room for manoeuvre would give Phormio's well-drilled ships the advantage.

The discrepancy in the maritime expertise of the rivals was common knowledge with Peloponnesian command too, so it was a nervy group who considered how to make progress against an opponent with the technical edge. Also, though they might have the advantage of numbers, their command structure was fragile. The forty-seven warships were provided by a number of allied states. We know the names of three of the Corinthian commanders, Machaon, Isocrates, and Agatharchidas who had brought so many of the

warships, and the egos of these and others officering them ensured no-one seemed to be in ultimate charge. And it was not just the command arrangements that were cumbersome but the ships as well. By and large, they were a clumsy and unwieldy collection. Quite a lot were older and slower vessels converted into troop transports. A trireme hardly lasted for much more than twenty years, and those at the end of their lives were frequently utilised as troop carriers, with levels of oarsmen removed to make room for the soldiers loaded on them. Some were converted to horse transports, where the oarsmen were reduced to sixty or so, that they might carry thirty horses to a ship. So it was a testy and maladroit maritime coalition that planned to get support to the army already campaigning under Cnemus, by crossing just to the west of Rion and then north to the Acarnanian shore. This fleet of transports and their protectors slipped into the calm water in the middle of the night as the stars were still shining. They were hoping to take advantage of the darkness to avoid the ships Phormio had laying in wait for them. Despite their superiority in number, they knew that if it came to a fight then they would find opposed to them an enemy commander who was certainly not overawed and who had a great deal of battle experience.

Knowing their vulnerability, the Peloponnesians hoped to cross the open water under cover of darkness and, if possible, avoid an encounter. But the vessels, decks crammed with soldiers and their equipment, were going to have to fight. They failed to get across the Gulf of Calydon to safety in time. Phormio's lookouts had spied their movements, and he launched his squadron. So, on seeing the Athenian line coming down out of the shadows to attack them, the Peloponnesians realised they could no longer avoid combat and decided to put their ships into a defensive formation and to move forward in that fashion. They deployed in a tight circle with ships prows pointed out to fend off any who might try and penetrate the laagered convoy. It was a classic defence against the tactic of *diekploús*, or breakthrough. This was where the attacking ships would row in between the enemy vessels then turn about to come in and ram them in the flank or rear. How they moved at all in this formation is difficult to imagine, but it must have been at a snail's pace, with those in front rowing slowly to allow the others backwatering to stay in formation. We know this, or a similar formation, was used on other occasions, usually by outnumbered fleets, famously by the Greeks against the Persians at Artemisium in 480 BC, and, indeed, in the Corcyra war that would soon break out. What is undeniable is that it

was a very negative tactic, handing the initiative to Phormio. It was also difficult to sustain for any length of time, as is clearly shown by what soon occurred.

The Athenian vessels had been beached at the mouth of the River Evenus, near the town of Chalcis, with the men mainly catching up on their sleep, when their scouts reported that the enemy were making weigh. An old man from an old family now made the difference. The seasoned warrior on the aft deck of his flagship, positioned at the head of his line, soon saw the target moving across their front. He was outnumbered, and the enemy arrangement looked formidable, but most of what he saw was encouraging. He had high confidence in his ships and men, and the enemy tactic allowed him to choose both the moment and the method of attack. If the Peloponnesians were lumbering, the Athenians' ships and commander were not. Lookouts were alert in the dead calm that precedes a Mediterranean dawn, as Phormio sent the warships out in a line. In the halflight, with the shadowed sea behind, they prepared to circle around the armada crossing towards the northern shore. Certainly there was risk here. It meant the circling vessels inevitably showed their vulnerable flanks to the enemy prows pointing at them. He calculated that they would not emerge to ram because this would inevitably disrupt their formation and turn the encounter into a battle of manoeuvre that the Spartans and their allies clearly did not fancy. It turned out he was right, even though the Peloponnesians had specifically left the five best sailing ships from the fleet in the centre of the circle, to be able to move out and attack where they were threatened. With no attempt made to drive off the circling warships, the result was the defending formation slowly moved ahead, with the Athenians vessels coming close in all around. The attackers, each with a gilded insignia of Athena showing proud, were threatening to ram, so the defenders contracted their circle, with the vessels inevitably moving nearer and nearer to each other. In these circumstances, the forty-seven ringed ships were forced to tighten their formation, making it even more difficult for the five small fast ships in the middle to emerge and attack their tormentors.

The Athenian admiral also had knowledge of local weather patterns. Phormio knew a wind usually blew out of the Gulf of Corinth at dawn. This information made him believe that he could do much more than just corral this enemy who were trying to break through and attack his allies. He had ordered his captains to threaten, but not actually to ram, because the wind from the gulf was known to gain in



strength as the sun rose, and, with the morning wearing on, he counted on it. The strengthening breeze blowing up the sea from the gulf made the Peloponnesians situation very difficult. The problems of keeping formation became even more trying for the crews, who, with little training in this kind of thing, soon had their oars fouling each other all around the defensive circle. Vessels went out of control, rolling all over the place, with hulls crushing into hulls. The decks filled with men were unstable, and the steering oars much less responsive as the desperate helmsmen tried to keep on course. There was confusion and disorder made worse by the triremes fouling the small craft in the middle of the circle who themselves crashed into the larger vessels' oars. The sailors tried to keep their craft off each other with poles, while the cacophony caused by the men's cries meant they could not hear the orders of the boatswains and pilots that might have directed their efforts. The circle disintegrated as each commander made increasingly desperate but ultimately futile efforts to ensure his vessel did not run into its neighbour.

Outside the ring, the wolves waited to pounce. Then some of the circling Athenian ships turned in, their prows facing the enemy. As rough waters made things even worse in the Peloponnesian laager, the orders were given for the oarsmen to pull the hardest, and the marines prepared to fight off enemy soldiers who might try and grapple them. The Athenians intended to stay free, and to pick the enemy off at will. The first trireme, which was under Phormio's personal command, to strike sank one of the enemies' flagships, causing even more disorder. Then the rest came in, breaking off banks of oars, pushing their bronze beaks deep in the flanks of the targets in front of them. Almost every contact meant a disabled vessel, and in the end it turned out hardly a fight at all. The defenders who were not holed or disabled gave up the ghost, and either ran south to get to the port of Dyme or for the protection of the nearest shore, at Patrae in Achaea. It had been like shooting fish in a barrel for the Athenians, and Phormio and his captains were in their element chasing down the fleeing foe. They captured twelve triremes altogether, and all the men on board except those few who could swim and were prepared to risk their lives to the churning waters. As the remnants of the routed marine made it to safety, the victors took their prizes in tow, secured their captives and sailed in triumph back past cape Rhium to anchor at Molycrium. This place was probably a good few miles inside the gulf but still west of Naupactus, and was as far as many of the captured craft could go if they were to be saved, being waterlogged after ramming and the

buffeting of battle. The wind and the sea it had raised, in the end, virtually delivered the Peloponnesians to their enemy, and it must have been a hard blow to their spirits, losing despite their preponderance in numbers. But they were allowed little time to wallow in regrets as three commissioners arrived in their camp. One was called Timocrates. He would pay with his life in the fight which he would soon help instigate. Another was Lycophron, and the third was the hero of Methone, Brasidas, whose activities we know nothing of since that occasion, apart from the probability of his being the previous years' eponymous *ephor*.

Spartans worried about two things almost equally. One was helot revolt and the other was the curse of sacrilege. Once, in the past, by spilling the blood of some of their servile population who had taken refuge in a holy place, they had incurred a curse of awful proportions. Committing such an act in such a place outside the permitted parameters of declared war incurred the ongoing wrath of the gods. From this ancient time the city fathers were determined to ensure against any repetition. However this did not entail for them any consideration of ceasing to carry out the traditional reign of terror when the elite of the *agoge* would be dispatched to murder any helots who showed signs of independence or leadership. No, the Crypteia continued to do their worst. What the Spartans did to make everything proper and formal was declare war each year against their own helots so that a bloody cull could be accomplished without causing any blight to fall on the community. This ceremony was one of the key tasks the *ephors* took on in their time of office, and Brasidas was no doubt involved. These officers, although amongst the most influential men in the state, only held office for a year. They were normally in the prime of life when they stepped down. These were Spartans who, at least to their fellows, must have seemed able and talented enough to get elected by the Assembly, so for such as Brasidas, whose blood pumped to the rhythms of the martial poet Tyrtaeus, and who Alcibiades compared to Achilles, it was always probable he would be marked out for command. He did not necessarily look for individual fame and glory, like the hero who butchered Hector in front of Troy. That kind of individualism was not overtly in the Spartan mindset. However, in the recesses of their hearts, a glorious death in battle might be looked forward to, bringing with it everlasting honour.

He had now been made one of the directors in this most important sector of Sparta's war efforts. Earlier success had made Brasidas a man

to be taken seriously. Spartan military organisation was always complicated. They wanted their men to be successful warriors and generals, but not to the extent that this might upset the delicate political balance at home. A poor performance in the field, or an especially impressive one, might warrant the old men at Sparta sending out a commission to look into what was going on. So, after the setback just experienced, it was no surprise that this group was dispatched to see up what had seemed to be, so far, a feeble effort. The feeling behind their dispatch took no account of the greater skills of the Athenian sailors, but instead an age-old cry had been raised of incompetence if not treason, 'the commissioners were accordingly sent in anger', and they wanted results soon.

So it was this man who arrived, with his two colleagues, to reinvigorate the men they found dejectedly tending their rigging and other maritime paraphernalia on the beaches stretching out under the acropolis hill at Cyllene. They saw battered hulls and wounded men, the effects of the defeat at Patrae, but something more insidious too. Morale had been dented, and it needed the enthusiasm and authority of the newcomers to cajole the ships' complements to buckle down and get their equipment into proper shape. The sea fight near Patrae had occurred at about the time Cnemus was involved in the desultory campaign around Stratus but now that officer, back from Acarnania, and in command, found himself harried into immediate action by the commissars from home. He manned what ships he could, those that had survived the earlier defeat and were ready and under orders, while waiting for others which the allies were preparing to reinforce for the new endeavour. How quickly things happened is not clear. The feeling is of not much time passing at all, yet common sense suggests it would have taken some days if not weeks for the news of the defeat to have reached Sparta, and for the three-man commission to have been appointed and made their way to the front. If they really had arrived only a few days after the first battle, it is very possible that the three had been dispatched earlier, as a supervisory mission. It was not so uncommon for the home government to get involved in this way, when war was heating up in a key region. It was an indication of a belief in cooperative leadership that was pretty normal when the Greeks came to fighting their wars. When Athenian fleets and armies left to go on campaign, it was the same, whether in nearby or in faraway places. More often than not, at least two generals, often more, are mentioned in command. On occasions, one is specified as overall commander, a kind of team leader, but equally as frequently not. The

nuts and bolts of how this worked are seldom described but the norm seems to have been each general was designated as in charge of a division of the army, while it was not unheard of for the overall command to be rotated. Equally often, we are just not told, although logic suggests that in the debates in the command tent someone would have to have the deciding say. Certainly at Marathon, so many years before, when opinion was split down the middle on whether to attack or not, a casting vote was delivered by Callimachus, the *polemarch* or war archon, but unfortunately we get few such details of decision making during the Peloponnesian war.

What combination of *ephors*, the Gerousia (a council of elders) or kings chose the three-men commission we do not know, but it is clear that Brasidas was by now considered to be a safe pair of hands by those in power so was included. When Phormio heard of the new arrivals, and the activity their coming had engendered, he took it very seriously indeed. Word was urgently sent home to Athens to ask for reinforcements, and initially it looked like the response would be respectable enough. Twenty triremes were equipped and launched but it turned out the administration had not been really listening to the man on the spot. He wanted help as soon as he could get it but first the squadron was diverted to go to the assistance of allies in faraway Crete. The Athenian admiral, despite his recent victory, still faced the same problem of how not only to defend his base at Naupactus but also to help his western friends against whatever combinations the Spartans might be brewing. He needed to be able to contend against an enemy thrust if it came directly across at Naupactus or into the open sea along the Acarnanian and Aetolian littoral. To achieve this, he kept his squadron always ready at Naupactus; able at a moment's notice to sail out past the lip of the gulf to an advanced position that would also have the added advantage that the Athenian reinforcements could join him more easily there than at Naupactus itself. And there he would be happy to meet any enemy coming out to fight again, knowing that his better-trained mariners could take advantage of the open water and potentially inflict another Patrae. But it was not without risk. Phormio knew that when he took this position he left his base potentially exposed, but the bigger picture demanded he took the chance, and it is not impossible his earlier success had given him some contempt for the enemies who he had corralled and hounded so easily. He had no reason to anticipate that, in the likes of Brasidas, he was now facing a more active, and a perhaps more brilliant, opponent.

The question for Brasidas and fellow commissioners and Cnemus was what to do to bring the Athenians down. They had the numbers but how should they bring these to bear. Their spies reported fires on the north shore just outside the mouth of the gulf so they knew where the enemy were, and they contemplated the options this potentially-exposed position might allow them. They could move both ways, but they decided that their best chance was to bring on a fight inside the gulf, away from the open sea, where their greener crews and clumsier vessels might be at less of a disadvantage. The decision was made, and the Peloponnesian fleet, now gathered at Cyllene, was ordered to move to Panormus just inside the gulf, to meet the rest of the available warships, and where troops from the interior could march to join them. This move east was intended to force Phormio to return inside the gulf by threatening Naupactus. From Cyllene, the armada, already made battle ready, cruised along the coast reaching the mouth of the gulf, entering and only coming to a halt once they reached Panormus where they found the army and the rest of their warships already there to meet them. In terms of numbers it was seventy-seven against twenty now, so Phormio really had no right to enter such a one-sided contest however superior his sailors were. A more cautious commander would have holed up in his base, but this was not the Athenian's style. Not in the least intimidated, he had set his squadron in motion too. They reached Molycrian Rhium at the lip of the gulf and less than ten miles west of Naupactus. This put his ships anchored directly across the water from his enemy. The distance between the two is underestimated by Thucydides as something over three quarters of a mile when it must have been nearer two. For almost a week the fleets remained eyeballing each other with both exercising their crews, and apparently being reluctant to move into an arena where they were not sure they had the advantage. The Peloponnesians might prefer not to fight in the open sea outside the mouth of the gulf, but, even inside, the waters might be wide enough to allow their enemy to benefit from their advantage in manoeuvring.

It was at dawn on the seventh day, after the previous six had slipped by, with the enemies looking across at one another, when the Peloponnesians moved. But before the action began, for the first time, we hear a voice attributed to Brasidas, as the Peloponnesian officers and men milled about the public tent to get the orders for the anticipated action. It was good stuff, suggesting that the debacle at Patras did not mean that the enemy were better men. Now they had been reinforced, fighting well would ensure triumph. The earlier

defeat was written off as an attempt at transporting troops that went wrong, when their ships had not been properly ordered to fight a battle at sea. Brasidas accepted there had been an element of inexperience on the sailors' part, but now he told them bravery would always trump expertise, particularly when it was backed with numbers. And in the attack they were about to make they not only had far more ships fighting but also a friendly coast behind them with plenty of hoplites there ready to support if they had to fall back on it. Lastly, he emphasised that a new leadership was now in charge who would ensure that lessons of the past would be learned, and that those who did not do so would be got rid off while brave men would be supported and rewarded.

With this encouragement, the sailors dumped their masts and rigging as orders were given for the fleet to deploy into four columns, each about twenty deep, and to move east again under oars in the direction of Naupactus. The Athenians, when they saw the activity across the strait, responded, crews stumbling and wading through the surf to launch their ships, then hugging the northern shore and sailing in line as they shadowed the enemy off to the south. Phormio's squadron, stretched out, was about the same length as just one of the Peloponnesian columns, and it was not just being horribly outnumbered that made the situation dangerous. He was exposing his forces to battle in this part of the gulf, with less sea room to utilise their superior naval skills. But there was no real choice, for it was far too perilous to leave a poorly-garrisoned Naupactus swinging in the wind, so they had to mirror the move of the enemy in that direction in the hope they might be able to get there in time to defend the place. The only mystery here is why he had not anticipated the possibility of the enemy move and returned the Messenian troops he had with him to protect the town. Naupactus could then have been held against any enemy approach. Phormio might have kept the initiative and been able to strike when he wished, and not be forced to react to his enemies' movements.

Before the Athenian vessels had launched, like Brasidas, Phormio too felt the need to encourage the men under his command. In an effort to stiffen the sinews amongst those put off by the very numbers of the enemy, he spoke up. It was the usual guff about Sparta's allies not really being up for the fight, and how generals, officers and men who had triumphed in the last fight would have no problem in doing so again as long as everybody stood to his post and did his job.

However formulaic they were, his words seemed to have had an effect. No doubt, men on the eve of battle crave reassurance rather than sophisticated dialectic. What is interesting, here, is that we know that Phormio had previously assured these very same men that he would not make them fight inside the straits against an enemy who would prefer battling in confined waters. He had told them he intended to only accept battle outside in open sea, and indeed he had clearly moved to the lip of the gulf at Molycrian Rhium with the intention of bringing on combat there. Yet in the end he had had to accept that he must change his plans when the enemy threatened Naupactus. So, it was with spirits rhetorically boosted on both sides that the four Peloponnesian columns cruised along with the Athenian one, mirroring each other. The two navies kept about a mile apart, with the Peloponnesian slightly ahead to begin with. Better seamanship ensured the Athenians soon got up with, if not ahead of, the opponents they could just make out over the water on the starboard side.

This parallel move had been started by the Peloponnesians, and lasted for some time. In command were Cnemus, Brasidas and other senior officers. On the afterdecks, they were visible to all of their fleet. With them were trumpeters and signallers with white or scarlet flags, ready to transmit orders. If these specialists were not available, then marines were standing by to flash messages from the sun's rays off their shields. The Spartan commanders were not big on gilded or flashy armour but with their red cloaks and fine-plumed helmets they still would have been the focus of attention, like any ancient commander expected to lead the way in battle.

For the Athenians now the worst happened: the enemy pounced. Cnemus gave the order for the triremes all to turn sharp to port, and, as the steersmen threw themselves hard onto their oars, cutting deep into the water, the warships turned, aiming to cross the short space between the two fleets. The men on the benches, from a steady pace, changed to top speed, and the deadly bronze beaks ploughed through the water at an awesome lick, against the Athenians' ships and their vulnerable flanks. The Peloponnesian vessels no longer in the shadow of the shore would now have become easily visible to their targets across the way who scrambled to try and adjust. It looked like disaster, with the last nine ships at the rear of the Athenian column caught unprepared as they tried to turn and face their foes. But either they could not manage it or numbers were against them. The feelings

of the crews can be imagined as the enemy bore down, driving towards them, and these desperate men, whether directly hit or just herded towards the shore, were soon a panicked mob rather than disciplined units. As the boat bottoms scraped the beach, the marines and crews were soon dropping the eight or so feet down from the decks to get to terra firma and away. Desperate fugitives looking round in panic for succour to come from anywhere they might find it, and they were lucky.

It had been a glorious start, on a fine cloudless day, for the Peloponnesian leadership, but Brasidas' first experience of major command was not going to turn out a cakewalk. The Messenian soldiers who had accompanied the Athenian fleet were marching along the shore back to Naupactus when they came upon the Athenian triremes hauled up on the beaches with their crews in flight, and the Peloponnesians crawling all over them. The troops following along behind what had been an organized squadron now saw their comrades driven onto the rocks with the enemy coming in hard after, determined to carry off the Athenian bottoms. The sailors on many of the Peloponnesian ships were already occupied lashing the captured hulls to their own vessels to get them off the beach, but this was always a difficult task, and was soon made much more so when the Messenian hoplites came careening down to drive them off and recapture the prizes. The hated Spartans were now within reach of their spearpoints, and these men who had been pushing hard to get back to defend their homes at Naupactus could not resist. They swooped down on targets preoccupied in securing their prizes and hardly in fighting order at all. The armoured infantry, with shields forward and spears poised, pushed on through the roiling sandy waters, easily downing un-armoured sailors and missile men. Fighting furiously, they clambered on board all the ships they could reach, friend or foe. The fact that the Peloponnesians were fitted for a sea fight was to the Messenians' advantage. They did not find transports, decks crowded with enemy hoplites, but only the few marines that each trireme would normally carry when at sea. So the only men who were armoured sufficiently to face them were present in pitifully low numbers, and could only try and hold them off, as the crews endeavoured to re-launch and get away from the unequal contest.

Nor indeed was this beach the only place where the combat had continued. There had been nine ships on the right of the Athenian line that had been driven on shore but the rest, eleven in all, had managed



to avoid the right wing of the Peloponnesians closing in on them. They did not stay to fight but fled towards the protection of Naupactus with twenty of the best sailers in the enemy fleet close on their rear. The attackers saw complete victory just ahead of them, with Brasidas and his colleagues urging on their captains and crews to make an end to the irritating intrusion of these Athenians into what they considered very much home waters. But of the eleven Athenian warships all except one reached the harbour of Naupactus. There 'by the temple of Apollo' they turned about and redeployed in line with beaks showing outwards, and no doubt with what troops were left in the town hotfooting down to help in the defence. But the pursuers, with trumpets blaring, and uttering cries of war, were confident. However they did not get to blows before something happened that changed the whole flavour of events.

The last Athenian trireme being hunted had not quite reached safety, and chasing behind it was a ship from the island of Leucas, commanded by Timocrates the squadron leader. It hallooed on its heels as the first of the chasing pack. This last of Phormio's ships was entering the roadstead outside Naupactus harbour when its commander saw a bulky round-bottomed merchantman anchored across her path. With the pilot and steersman he thought quickly to take advantage, knowing the high quality of their oarsmen and crew. Having passed by one side, and in the lee of the merchantman, they managed to turn their craft 360 degrees, right around, presumably out of sight of the pursuing vessel, or the sequel would not make much sense. Because the Leucanians, when they saw the Athenian vessel coming back at them from the other side of the merchantman, bronze beak first, were taken completely by surprise.

Below decks, most of the Athenian crews, perched on their benches, could not see what was happening. All they could do was breath in damp sweat-soaked air, bend their backs to gain traction, obey orders and hope to god those above them knew what they were doing. There, the steersmen tried to drive the beak into the planking on the enemies' stern quarter at a narrow angle; then there would be the least likelihood of it breaking off. Holed below the waterline, the target swiftly became swamped. These buoyant wooden-framed vessels did not usually go to the bottom straight away, but, disabled and waterlogged, there were soon swarms of oarsmen clambering into the water, desperate for anything to hold onto that might float, with those who could swim making for the shore. All this occurred while

their marine comrades fought hand-to-hand with opponents on decks already nearly awash. Their only hope was that they might overcome the men they were fighting, and find a way onto the warship that had cleaved their own. If they could take over the enemy vessel, even if it was stuck at least it was not floundering, so they might survive the experience. But it was not to be, and the end was signalled when Timocrates, the man in command, having realised that all that faced him was capture, refused to accept the dishonour, and used his short Spartan sword to take his own life.

The effect on the previously-triumphant Peloponnesians of their comrade being so comprehensively knocked out of the fight is not in doubt. However impressed they might have been by Brasidas' rhetoric in the safety of their camp, now, in action, it was a different matter. The men in the ships following the Leucanian seemed profoundly shocked by what they had seen. Their best craft had been lost and, like an army whose champion has been downed in front of them, morale was badly affected. The oarsmen stopped rowing, not wanting to get any closer to this clearly dangerous enemy, but this was the worst thing they could have done, because, without any weigh, the nineteen triremes left in the chasing pack began to foul each other. Some had been thoroughly disrupted in the pursuit and others were so effected by the loss of the lead ship that they dug their oars in and backed water to wait for the rest of the fleet to come up. This turned out to compound their problems, because it not only brought them to a stop just across the line of the beaks of the enemy triremes posted in the harbour but it also meant they lost momentum and became vulnerable to going aground in shallow water with which their pilots were unfamiliar.

This was the Athenians' opportunity. In the cacophony of combat it was the chance for their eleven remaining warships. They had got themselves well ordered in line, and positioned to take advantage of an enemy who had, moments before, looked about to finish of a fine victory but now were themselves vulnerable. Why the effect of the loss of one ship had such a deleterious effect on the Peloponnesians is never explained, after all they still greatly outnumbered their foe. But certainly, the event was remembered as what changed the fate of the day. Where Phormio was during all this we do not know. His decision to follow the enemy into the gulf, and his involvement in the fight, are not detailed. A recent commentator on the Athenian navy<sup>4</sup> has him in command on the quarterdeck of the Athenian vessel being chased into

the Naupactus sound where the merchantman was anchored, and indeed it makes some sense even if no evidence exists. A more junior officer would have been less likely to take upon himself such a risky manoeuvre when surely there was a good chance he could have made it to safety amongst his fellows arranged in the harbour mouth.

But whoever had been the man who took the momentous decision to turn and fight, it was now no longer a pursuit but a formal battle with both fleets facing prow to prow, and only a small amount of sea room between them. We can imagine the stress the crews of the Peloponnesian triremes found themselves under, officers blaming pilots, steersmen blaming the crew, and many of the soldiers terrified in an alien environment. All of the men, except those on the lower decks, now saw the oncoming foe, the painted details on the prows, figure heads tricked out garishly, and the sun flashing bronze on the three-pronged rams. This was not a good state of mind to go into battle, but fight they had to, as the Athenian triremes came fast out of the harbour creaming the water fanwise towards them. Now the encouragement Phormio had given when some of his followers were worried about the disparity in numbers was remembered. They had already defeated this enemy, and, after what they had just seen, it rang true that the way to success was through audacious aggression. The triremes drawn up in the harbour mouth were up for doing the same as their comrades had done to the Leucanian ship. They knew they had the skills to hit the enemy at the right speed, crucial because at too great a velocity the ram would get stuck too deep in the enemy planking to be withdrawn, too slow and the target might be able to turn away. The vessels themselves could get to near a maximum ten knots at manoeuvring speed, though for contact they would slow it down to at least half that. The narrow tunnel with just the sight of the backs of heads and shoulders would have been the view of the oarsmen. These men had built their muscles in a farming life but had rapidly adapted to the demands of the benches on a ramming ship. But at least this muscle-racking adrenaline rush of fifty strokes a minute did not last long. They did not know much of what was going on around them, only when impact was imminent because the order came to back water again to try and ensure the ram did not bite too deep to be extricated. They had trained often enough to pull in their own oars, sheep tallow lubricating the leather sleeves they went through, and now these men were willing and able to show their aptitude. They could crush down along the flank of the enemy ship, breaking off their oars. The rudders would make the difference, giving

direction, whilst the three levels of oarsmen would listen to the piper whose rhythm gave them their stroke. When they struck, enemy rowers were caught and crushed by their own oars driven back by the force of the vessel hitting them, and the marines and archers would be thrown unbalanced about the decks of their boats.

The gulf outside Naupactus in which they were about to fight may not have been broad open water but the numbers of vessels involved was not so great. This meant the Athenians had the sea room they needed. They knew that they must try and keep free from entanglements, to hit and pull off, because if ships locked together the enemies' superiority in numbers must ensure the combat would end in defeat, particularly if it came to fighting it out between the marines, as the Peloponnesians' were generally of better quality. And, caught close, the superior numbers of enemy archers would pick off officers, sailors and steersmen, and throw the crews into confusion. Oarsmen were always good targets, and wounding even a few of these would cause mayhem as dropped oars would ensure a complete loss of rhythm. Anything like this would lose the Athenians the edge they needed to compensate for lack of numbers.

There was an element of surprise. The Peloponnesians just did not expect this much aggression, and the upshot was that the Athenians grasped victory from the jaws of defeat. When the enemy saw them bearing down they hardly stood to fight at all. When they heard the paean, a pious yell meant to freeze the blood of an opponent and raise the spirits of comrades, they backed water and turned about to flee, with oarsmen pulling at top speed, in the direction of Panormus. But in turning they showed their vulnerable side, and six were not quick enough. There was a noisy splintering chaos of ships as rams connected, as vessels drove past, shearing the oars off their targets, while other attackers coming alongside threw grappling hooks over the rails and prepared to board. There was no fight left in the Peloponnesian crews and, while some may have risked the sea where the victors speared them as they floundered in the water or held onto barrels and spars in an effort to stay afloat, most probably surrendered. But this was not the only benefit of the turnaround of the day. As Phormio's ships chased back after the defeated foe, they saw in front of them the left wing of the Peloponnesian fleet that had fought the Messenians. They had, under way with them, as prizes, the salvaged Athenian triremes they had managed to bring away from the shore, but the process of securing them and herding them back to base

had taken time. So when the victors from Naupactus were seen bearing down after their fleeing comrades, the captors let the vessels go so they themselves could get away. The prize crews that the Peloponnesians had put on board were either killed or captured. The Athenians gathered together their own victorious vessels, plus the enemy prizes they had won, and the recaptured ones as well, taking breath as they watched the remnants of the enemy scamper for safety towards the coast at Panormus.

There was much to do after this fissiparous encounter, some of which was pleasurable, like putting up a victory trophy outside Naupactus where the triumph had begun. Prizes were given to the best and bravest combatants too. Other tasks were less uplifting, like picking up the corpses of men who had fallen on the shore and the wrecks of the ships that the Messenians had prevented the Peloponnesians from floating off the beach. Whether these were able to be made serviceable again we are not told, but after such a struggle many of the surviving vessels must have sustained considerable damage and would need refitting. While this refurbishing was underway, twenty triremes hove into site coming from the west. This was the force that had been sent from Athens finally appearing, and those welcoming them, no doubt, did so with a wry smile, arriving as they did after all the hard work had been done. But at least these reinforcements, on hand after their Cretan diversion, served to emphasise that the balance of power had completely turned Phormio's way. Twice he had shown he could best the enemy with only twenty ships, and now he had double that number, besides those he had captured, while his enemies' seventy-seven had been whittled down by not a few in the last encounter.

But this was only one way of looking at events. An alternative was to be found amongst the Peloponnesians. Tending their fires on the beach and giving what help they could to the wounded, their mood was not that of a beaten outfit. They had had losses, and, at the end, some of their comrades had run, but many remembered the first clash of arms when half the Athenian fleet had been driven pell mell onto the beach. In light of this, it is not such a surprise that Brasidas and his fellows put up their own trophy on the Achaean side of Rhium, claiming their initial success was at least the equal of the Athenian victory that came after. This claim may not be completely without foundation, as they certainly retained one captured Athenian warship to proffer as part of the dedication. This second encounter had not

been such a clear-cut result as the earlier fight at Patras, and Diodorus of Sicily, writing a few centuries later, is somewhat confused on this matter of the outcome, first reporting of the battle of Naupactus 'that the victory he won was equivocal' but also, after the twenty reinforcements arrived, suggesting Phormio had swept his enemies from the seas; 'after this, when the Athenians had dispatched twenty triremes, the Lacedaemonians sailed off in fear to Corinth, not daring to offer battle'.<sup>5</sup> Nor is this the only occasion in this era when both sides claimed to have won the same battle. In a couple of generations' time in the same region both Peloponnesians and Athenians would build trophies claiming victory after a maritime encounter off the coast of Acarnania near Leucas. How far any source gets all the truth remains difficult. Even when contemporary historians claim to be reporting from those involved, this is no absolute assurance of veracity. Memories of combat are notoriously suspect, even the most disinterested of combatants, from confusion, fear and fatigue, can often only retain the most blurry of outlines.

Still, what is clear is that the future was not looking great for Brasidas and his colleagues. The convoluted battling in the summer seas in 429 BC had shown what their enemy could accomplish with skill and enterprise against the odds. It was clear that the triremes in the hands of these high-quality crews and commanders functioned better than their own. The Peloponnesian fleet might remain largely intact as a fighting outfit; the Gulf of Corinth had seen no maritime Cannae, yet their failure had been palpable. Even when the Peloponnesians had possessed some fast manoeuvrable ships, as in the first encounter near Patrae, they did not seem to know how to use them effectively. Now any chance of winking the Athenians out from the Gulf of Corinth looked very slim indeed, and the option of making further inroads in the northwest, for the moment, seemed a dead letter. Indeed, a real dent seems to have been made in the maritime will to win of the Peloponnesians. Future naval efforts were far from universally aggressive for some years to come, while the Athenians went from strength to strength, with the next year seeing them mobilising a fleet that is reported reaching 250 ships, the largest during the whole war. In fact, the final pulse of this campaign illustrates the change, because at the beginning it had been Phormio desperate to stop his enemies making conquests in the west while now it was the Athenian admiral who was able to make his influence felt in that region.

It was in the winter, after his opponent had dispersed his fleet, that the Athenian acted. Coasting west, he took the Naupactus squadron out of the gulf, and north to reach the Arcanian coast at Astacus. With 800 mixed Athenian and Messenian hoplites Phormio arrived amongst his old friends at Stratus and Coronta in the Achelous valley. There it turned out to be something of a political house-cleaning exercise, digging out some questionable new leaders who were thought to be in cahoots with the enemy. Then, after reinstalling trustworthy people in power, he considered the possibility of a descent on Oeniadae, a hostile community of considerable strategic significance near the mouth of the Achelous. But, with the weather against him, the old veteran decided to draw his efforts for the year to a close. After this, he returned the way he had come, and, after spending the rest of the winter setting Naupactus in order, Phormio returned back to Athens in the spring, taking captured ships and prisoners with him.

But the Athenian admiral was not the only character active over the winter. If some of his fellow officers had been deflated by the two naval defeats of the summer Brasidas, Cnemus and others showed, though, that they might be down but that they were far from out. It would have been natural for them to be worried about their positions, since it was the three commissioners pushing for an offensive to turn around the Patras setback that had compounded matters at Naupactus. On this occasion, we hear of no complaint from the home authorities in Sparta. It is possible that they were persuaded by the claim of victory in the later fight, since it would have been in the interest of many who returned home to accentuate what had been achieved in their reports. So these leaders, organising the refit of the navy at Corinth, were responsive when word of an opportunity arrived. This was something that might afford some compensation for what had gone wrong before. Winter would soon be coming, and then, at the end of 429 BC, Brasidas, with Cnemus and the other commanders, showed the kind of metal that would make him famous in a few years' time. When representatives from Megara arrived with a proposal, they listened attentively. The plan outlined was to make a surprise attack on the Piraeus itself, to exploit the very confidence and security that the enemy now felt about their maritime superiority, by doing the unexpected. The idea was for the crews from the fleet now anchored in the Corinthian gulf to march overland by the Isthmus to Megara port, man another squadron they would find there, and with these ships attack the Athenians in their own backyard.

The details of the enterprise were revealed as the oarsmen trailed over the hills of Gerania. They carried their bench pads, that made the hours sitting on hard wood tolerable, as well as the long oars with which they plied their trade, and the leather thongs that kept them snug in the rowlocks. Their old ships had been made safe in billets at Lechaion and bases around the Crisaeon gulf, and the intention was to find and man forty new ones ready for them in the docks at Nisaea, the Saronic gulf port of Megara. It must have been very difficult but security was kept tight. It is reported that the people at Piraeus had no idea of trouble as the end of the sailing season approached. In fact, it seems even the normal precautions of using guard ships to keep watch had been dropped. It was well before dawn when the crews arrived at Nisaea, exhausted from the long road they had travelled but still eager to be part of what seemed a well-contrived coup. Benches were filled, and steersmen and pilots were settled at their posts as the crews and marines took up their stations. Brasidas and the other officers donned their fighting armour on the decks of the triremes for what was intended as immediate action. This was to be a swift strike in the dead of the night.

But what had begun so well hit difficulties. We are informed that the high command reassessed the risk of attacking Piraeus directly as too great, though this does not fit well with the venturesome character of Brasidas. So perhaps an alternative suggestion is right, that a wind rose that stopped the task force making headway in the direction of the enemy's main port. In any case, an alternative target was quickly chosen, and the ships, with plenty of soldiers aboard, made the short passage to the nearby island of Salamis. They knew that, at the nearest crossing point, a fort called Bodorum had been built, and a squadron of three triremes kept on post there. As the boats struck the shore, the soldiers unshipped rapidly, rushing to attack the walls, and were easily able to overcome a garrison still rubbing the sleep from their eyes. The triremes discovered there were also towed off. Their crews had been no more prepared than the fort's garrison when this storm broke. The invaders spread over the whole island, wrecking with a will, carrying off anything not tied down and burning the rest. But the downside was that, by now, fire signals had alerted the defenders along most of Attic coast as well as at the Piraeus, where everybody was now up and about, and very aware of what was going on. Some people in Athens were panicking, thinking the enemy had actually arrived in Piraeus, and, even when disabused, those in charge were hugely concerned that the island of Salamis would now be



turned from a bulwark against attack into a base for a future invader.

Yet this raid, that at first seemed to promise so much, was not destined to produce any great results. The Athenian response, though some time in coming, was good enough. First, soldiers manned Themistocles' walls round Piraeus in large numbers, then, when the sun rose, the home fleet was got underway, with the best of the crews and the bravest marines making a show of leading the way to throw out the attackers. The intruders, when they saw the host of well-manned triremes heading towards the position they had just established on Salamis, began to get very cold feet. To risk a fight to wreck the Piraeus might have been worth it, but now they would only be contesting the ownership of Salamis, the occupation of which, in the long term, would be bound to be almost impossible to sustain. They had little stomach left for a contest at sea. It had become clear that the ships they had taken over at Nisaea were in very poor condition. They had not been beached and dried for so long that they were waterlogged and sluggish to handle. So, when the Athenians' triremes came pouring forward out of the morning light, the order was given to pack up what they could and fall back. The invaders reached the safety of Megara port with little trouble, and, disembarking with hardly a pause to rest, took the same road they had come down back to the Corinthian harbours and their old ships. From old sweats to new recruits, they no doubt would have cursed the officers who had brought them on this fool's errand; but now at least they could look forward to the kind of rest that the approach of winter normally meant for seamen.

So, in the end, Brasidas and his colleagues had achieved little enough, certainly insufficient to compensate for the setbacks experienced. Counting the cost showed that, instead of turning the tables on the cunning man Phormio, they had overseen the loss of more than another half a dozen ships, and now they had again failed in an attempt to catch the opposition with their pants down. We do not know how the news was received in Sparta, but Brasidas still seems to have had reserves of kudos to draw on, and, whatever else might be said about him, he was clearly a tryer. We hear of no criticism of this vigorous officer or his comrades back home, or of any attempts to bring them to book in the courts. The battle at Patras had shown a difference between Athenian and Spartan leadership, the dash of Phormio against the stodginess of his first opponents. At least, since Brasidas' arrival, there had been some evidence of *éclat* and

imagination. And that he was far from under a cloud is clearly shown on the next occasion the hero of Methone enters the action. Brasidas' subsequent appearance showed he had lost nothing of his reputation, and he remained an important figure, although, on this coming occasion, he would become involved with a different man with a different purpose.

## Chapter Four

### Conflict in Corcyra

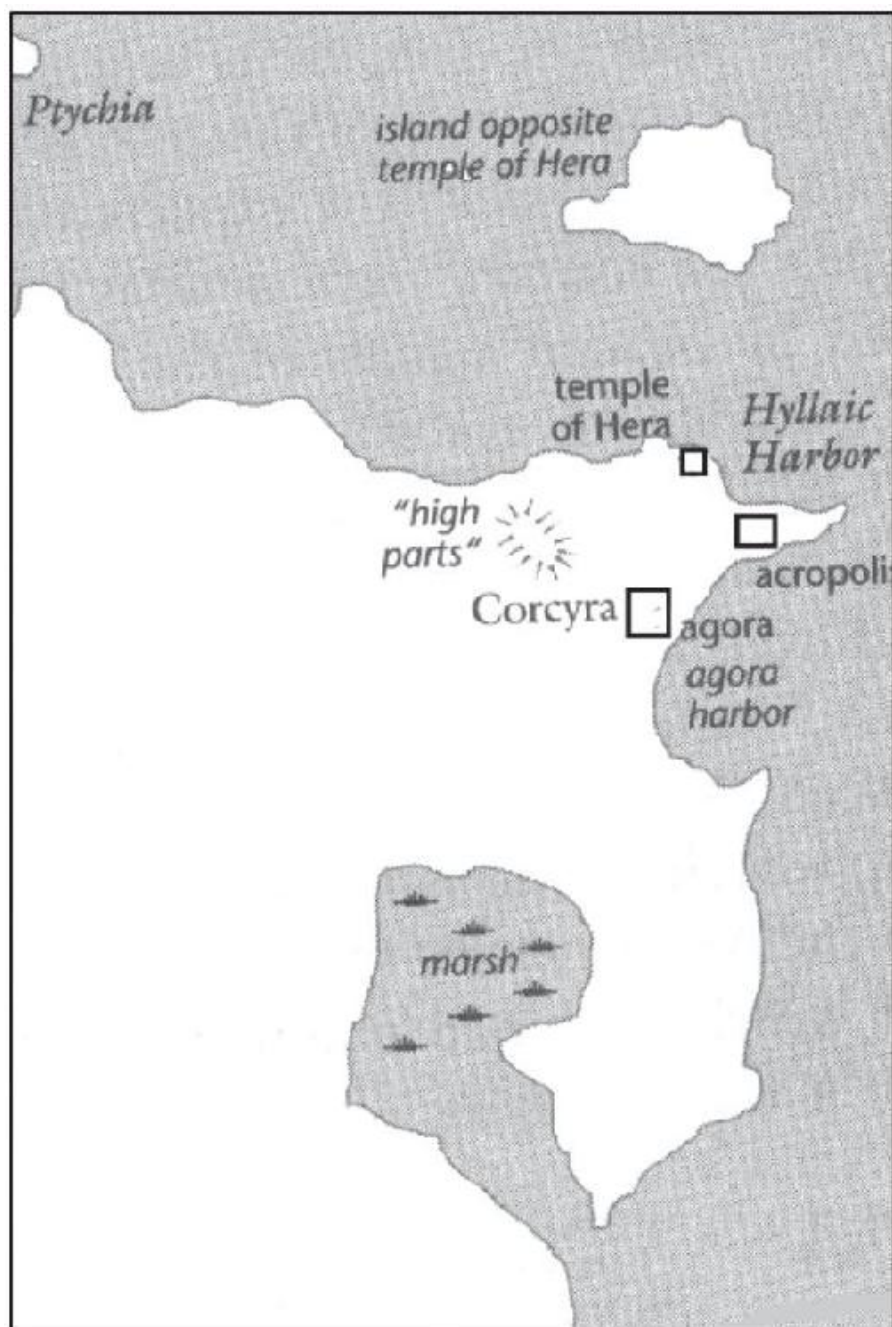
Brasidas and Sparta had been at war for nearly half a decade. This was already a long time for a people not at all equipped to fund and carry out such a drawn-out conflict. These were crabbed and provincial traditionalists used to deciding things on the battlefield pretty quickly before returning to the familiarity of home, to honour the dead and their gods in a manner hallowed by tradition. But there were precedents. The Messenian wars were affairs of generations, and the first Peloponnesian war had lasted near to fifteen years. But the former had been a home-turf dispute, and the latter had spluttered and flickered in brief outbursts rather than coming on bright and strong every year like the current contest. In this almost five-year period, Brasidas' trajectory had seen him rise from local hero to gain an important place in the Spartan high command. But in the Gulf of Corinth campaign he had been part of a team, clearly a key member, if the information that it was he who gave the pre-battle speech is correct, but working in concert not only with the colleagues who had gone with him to the front but with the commander-in-chief, Cnemus, and others as well. The next step would take him further upwards, if not actually to independent command. The character of the man with whom he would share responsibility would make it come close.

The scene of his next involvement would not be so far away from the Gulf of Corinth and the western march, where Phormio had been so keen to defend Athenian interests in the last year's fighting. And interestingly, immediately before Brasidas became involved, it was the great admiral's son who tried his hand at making a reputation where the family name already carried such weight. The Acarnanian allies of Athens had faith not just in the man but in the gene pool as well, and insisted a relative of Phormio be given charge of their front. So his son, Asopius, got the nod to take thirty ships in the summer of 428 BC to go to the assistance of these important friends. It was a watery *razzia* on the way out, as he pillaged his way along the Spartan coast before rounding the whole peninsula. Taking just twelve of his fleet, the rest were sent home, to Naupactus. Once there, it became clear he was intent on doing what his father had left undone in his last intervention. He intended to have a crack at Oeniadae. The idea was a combined operation with his small squadron approaching up the River

Achelous, and the whole Acarnanian levy, meeting them there to besiege the place, overrunning the country, and cutting the defenders off from outside help. They anticipated that once the inhabitants saw their farms go up in smoke they would soon submit, but, in fact, they turned out to be made of tougher stuff, showing such a determination to defend their walls that the attackers soon reached the conclusion the game was not worth the candle. The Acarnanians went home, while Asopius, still eager to match his progenitors' achievements, tried a raid on the nearby island of Leucas. Landing at Nericus on the eastern shore, he hoped to pressure the people to change allegiance to the Athenian cause, but underestimated both their commitment and their capacity. He ended up ambushed by a combination of local forces and some Peloponnesian League vessels which were cruising in these waters. The Athenians sustained considerable casualties and had to ask for a truce to get the bodies of their men back, before leaving soon after. Given that we never hear of Asopius again, perhaps he was amongst those killed. The son clearly lacked the talent of the father, and the old man's luck as well. It could be said of Phormio that he was much missed in the later stages of the war. The same could not be suggested of his offspring.

But this was very much a sideshow, and much bigger stories were going to unfold for both sides during the coming fighting season. For the Spartans it would be around the siege of Plataea, and for Athens the revolt of Mytilene. And it was what occurred at the closing stages of the latter that brought Brasidas to the fore again. Towards the end of winter of 427 BC, the Athenian siege of rebellious Mytilene had been going on since the previous autumn, and these new friends of Sparta were feeling the strain. To buck them up and keep them to the task the Peloponnesians despatched a very resourceful agent called Salaethus. This ancient-world 007 was taken in secret on a boat that landed him by Pyrrha, at the head of the large bay that almost bisected the middle of the island of Lesbos. From there the city was overland to the south, and this agent not only got to the environs without being uncovered, but he discovered that a swift-flowing stream made a passage through the besiegers' lines of circumvallation. Slipping down through this at night, he made his way to the city walls, and, making himself known to the defenders, he was allowed to enter. Once his credentials were established and he was brought before the magistrates he made every effort to persuade them to continue resistance, stressing that not only would the whole Spartan army soon be invading Attica but that, when it became safe to set sail,

a major naval force would be dispatched to their relief. On top of this he was able to offer his own considerable military skills to help the defenders, who now completely dumped the idea of negotiating with their attackers, and committed themselves and their citizens to all-out resistance.



**Map 5:** Corcyra Town.

The Spartan administration was as good as its word. The invasion of Attica was got going straight away, and, more importantly for the hard-pressed people of Mytilene, a naval squadron comprising the best the Peloponnesian League could mobilise was dispatched. It numbered forty-two triremes, and the man in charge was called Alcidas. For whatever reason, the fleet was not sharp in getting up and going, it may well have been the normal delays, inevitable when the contributors to the Peloponnesian marine ranged from as far north as Ambracia and far south as Cythera. Or it may be the leadership was dilatory, as it is suggested that Alcidas was 'loitering on the way'. The upshot was disastrous for the cause, as, without succour, the besieged people began to feel that they would soon have no option but to come to an arrangement with the Athenians, this despite all the efforts of Salaethus, who had remained influential in their councils. This active man realised to what a pass things had come, and decided something more had to be done than just wait on the expected relief squadron. But he misread the local political scene and the sentiment of the people. Showing that condescension so typical of these Spartans when in positions of influence away from home, he tried to gather forces sufficient to sortie out and break the siege from the inside. But to make up the numbers he decided to arm 'the people' which must mean those of the non-propertied classes, who could not afford their own arms. These he equipped with heavy weapons from the arsenal.

Salaethus, having no idea of the resentment felt by many of those he was calling on, had his new model soldiers paraded, and dependable officers appointed. But many of the recruits were very much more in sympathy with their besiegers than their own administration and its Spartan friends. They were also very hungry after a winter on short rations, with rumours rife that the people in charge were keeping back what supplies were left in order to fill their own bellies. So, with the newly-distributed spears and shields in their hands, they decided to gratify a long-felt desire to ditch the present leadership, and the privations they had brought on them. It was virtual mutiny now, with officers completely disregarded, and a swiftly-forged Jacobin command, of these people in arms, demanding that the grain reserves kept back to keep up the siege should be immediately brought out and divided among them. The corollary of this, of course, was that with the remaining provisions all consumed they would have no option but to directly surrender the city to the besiegers. Despite Salaethus' blustering, the city fathers had no real alternative to agreeing to this. If they did not the people would take

the supplies anyway, and any credulity they might still have had would be lost. They bit the bullet, agreed to the demands and sent envoys to their tormentors outside. In fact, these men found the Athenian commander, Paches, in reasonable mood, and he agreed to allow them to send to Athens to argue the case for what they had done, and that in the meantime his men would not kill, enslave or imprison anybody inside the walls. The men who had actually led the coup that took the city into the Spartan camp, unsure of their safety with their own people, fled as the Athenians entered the town, to find sanctuary at the local altars to the gods. Once order was restored, Paches was again light handed in his treatment, declining the opportunity to eliminate these clear enemies of Athens. He only removed them to custody on the island of Tenedos, some fifty miles up the coast of Anatolia towards the Hellespont.

While these dramatic events were playing out, the Peloponnesian fleet, now reduced to forty triremes, was slow in coming. These warships could make good time when they wanted to, eight knots cruising speed has been evidenced, and they might even cover 130 miles in a long day. But on this occasion they clearly did not push it. Rounding the peninsula, they dawdled on the crossing to Delos. It may have been part strategy to ensure they kept away from Athenian lookout posts and so could get to the front without news reaching the enemy at Piraeus. But this meant they had only reached Icarus, an island just west of Samos, when the locals informed them that the Mytilenians had already surrendered. In fact, by the time they got certain knowledge of what had happened, they were on the mainland at Embatum near Erythrae, a full seven days since the Athenian troops had entered the Lesbian city. A senior officer from Elis urged his commander to try and retake Mytilene, positing that if they struck quickly with the advantage of surprise they might recapture it. But Alcidas was having none of it, and even when some locals from Ionia invited him to capture a town in their country, to make a base for further operations, he spurned them too. This was despite the fact there were plenty of inhabitants tired of Athenian hegemony who would have turned to the Spartans if they showed a determined face. Alcidas evinced no inclination to follow any of this forceful council, and ordered his commanders to turn their ships' prows west back home towards the Peloponnese.

This was not the last time Alcidas would be urged to action and refuse. But on this occasion he had the final say, and he was not

clement. He first killed most of the prisoners taken on the cruise after landing at Myonnesus by Teos, only to relent on reaching Ephesus when envoys from Samos arrived claiming the people he was doing away with had only aided the Athenians under constraint, and would become friends of Sparta if he released them. Those captives from Chios and some others had been taken when they blundered into the Spartan force, thinking them Athenian ships, unable to believe a Peloponnesian League squadron would venture so far into enemy-controlled waters. But if he now showed a little more desire to win hearts and minds amongst the Asian and Island Greeks then he did not demonstrate much self belief, clearly fearing that the Athenians might come down on him in overwhelming strength once they learned of his presence in their bailiwick. So he took the decision to go back home directly from Ephesus. Even now it looked for a time that they might have lingered too long. Guard ships had spotted them and informed Paches and his fleet at Lesbos. These, alert and active, moved quickly, barrelling down at top speed to try and intercept the intruders as they headed out to open sea using currents that took them west to cross to the Peloponnese. The chase continued as far as Patmos Island before the Athenians finally gave up. But making Alcidas' ships risk the open waters meant they were caught in a summer storm not far from the coast of Crete, and scattered to the four winds. The far-strewn navy eventually limped back to their base at Cyllene.

After all this huff and puff, with little achieved, this Peloponnesian League navy recuperated. Cyllene was situated at the end of a hilly promontory, pushing into the Ionian Sea which controlled the passage between Zacynthus Island and the mainland. In what is otherwise flat country, it was ideal as a defensible base. A crusader castle now occupies the highest point, at 700 feet where the acropolis had stood, commanding a community that provided the western Peloponnesian fleet with its main base. Where locals now enjoy the holiday beaches, 2,500 years ago craftsmen and sailors made efforts to refit the battered ships that had just limped in. And there, they also found Brasidas sent on a mission to egg on the man in charge of the Spartan League's aquatic taskforce, whose failure in the Mytilene project had been noted back at home. Alcidas found the newcomer was not empty handed when he joined the disconsolate voyagers who just reached shelter after surviving the storm-tossed seas round Crete. He had with him thirteen triremes from the allies at Leucas and Ambracia, while he also carried orders for the considerable force that Alcidas would command once repairs had been completed. New opportunities had



arisen in an old and familiar stomping ground. Corcyra had been the tinder box in which the whole war had caught flame, and it is remarkable how often this island on the northwest of the Greek world was the context of events. It would even be on the way to action there that the defining campaign of the Archimedean war was undertaken. This event changed the whole direction of things, and would involve both Brasidas and a rival whose fates would be inexorably intertwined at Amphipolis.

The authorities at Sparta intended, by exploiting trouble that had just broken out at Corcyra, to try and make up for the failure at Lesbos. Brasidas was there as councillor to the commander of the fleet, his job to make clear what importance was attached to success in this enterprise. The commercially-advantageous location of Corcyra on the way to Magna Graecia and Sicily had long made her important. Those who ruled there did not exactly control the route to the grain-rich west, but a power based there might grow prosperous, themselves, and deny access to the region to their enemies. Corfu Island itself had fertile lowlands in its southern section, so a good-size community might feed itself from local produce, so different from many of the other islands nearby that were hardly more than rocky outcrops. Corcyra city, founded halfway down the east coast, on a thin peninsula, was very defensible, only vulnerable from the north side, and well provided with sheltered roadsteads. These advantages had made the colonists that came from Corinth confident and independent from the start. They were disinclined to take much notice of the mother city if they did not feel it was in their interest. And in recent years, and for a good long time before, the Corcyraeans had been firm friends of Athens, a deep-dyed enemy and maritime rival of Corinth.

Political rifts between the citizens were as poisonous as anywhere in the Greek world, if not even more so. The social make up was not dissimilar to that of Athens, though on a smaller scale, as there was sufficient fertile farmland in the south to sustain prosperous middling farmers of the hoplite class, while an aristocratic landed elite held estates both on the island and the mainland across the strait. As well, there were poorer farmers, eking out a living in the rugged north of the island, and the usual number of labourers, craftsmen and others subsisting on wages to make others rich. It being a maritime community, there was a considerable merchant and military marine, ensuring there were plenty of sailors and traders in the mix; a class and faction powder keg that might anytime erupt into revolution. The

popular party had been in control for some time, but now these pro-Athenian Jacobins found themselves tangling with something very different from a loyal opposition. It began with repatriations. The Corcyraean *proxeni*, a Corinthian citizen with island connections who took on the task of representing her interests in Corinth, had apparently somehow managed to put his hands on the huge amount of 800 talents, and put it up as surety for some men captured at ‘the sea fights off Epidamnus.’ These had been the prisoners of Sybota taken back to Corinth after the battle, and who, at least the better-heeled amongst them, had been well treated in the hope that this might be remembered when they went home. But what is very odd is the size of the ransom. It was enormous, amounting to more than the annual tribute of the Delian League. Indeed, the man who reported it might not have fully believed in the story himself, and thought, instead, that the prisoners may have been released on a promise, that once home they would persuade their fellow citizens to dump their Athenian alliance and bring the island over to the Peloponnesian side.

These men had been as good as their word, and had been talking to their friends and associates to good effect by the time two diplomatic parties, one from Athens and another from Corinth, arrived in the port of Corcyra city. These representatives met with an administration that had clearly been persuaded by some of the arguments the returning prisoners had made, because, though they did not ditch the Athenian connection completely, they agreed that they should keep good relations with Corinth and the other Peloponnesians too. So if the islanders had not quite changed sides, they were now effectively declaring neutrality in the ongoing war. But the ex-prisoners from Corinth were not content with this result, and, as a body with their oligarchic friends, pressed to have Peithias, the leader of the popular party who had led the way in committing the Corcyraeans to the Athenian side, brought to trial. This really stirred the pot, as this powerful man after being acquitted of ‘enslaving Corcyra to Athens’ himself brought charges against five of the leading oligarchs for sacrilege. He claimed they had ordered the cutting of wood from a precinct sacred to Zeus and Alcinous, the son of the nymph who gave her name to the island. Peithias had no doubt about whom the prisoners who accused him were working for. He knew it was his long-time oligarch rivals who were after him, and he had no intention of taking it lying down.

The courts upheld the populist politician’s claim, and the resultant

fine was so substantial that even these plutocrats asked for time to pay (the amount was a *stater*, very approximately three drachmas, for each stake cut, so, presumably, they must have been taking a lot of wood for a long time) and tried to curry sympathy by settling down in the city temples while they did so. But these moneybag suppliants made an unconvincing show, and Peithias' influence in the council ensured the penalty was demanded in full, and immediately. Hit in their purses, these characters were now ready to embark on any enterprise however desperate. They gathered as many retainers and supporters as were available, armed them with knives, and led them against the council that was sitting in session. Opting to confront their rivals in their stronghold, the insurgents broke down the council chamber door, overcame the attendants and attacked the magistrates as well as those who were in audience with them. Peithias and sixty more were cut down as they tried to run or defend themselves against assailants with bloody knives in their hands. Members of the popular faction suffered the most in the carnage, though a rump managed to get out of the charnel house and rush down through the city streets to the port. There, they found refuge on the Athenian trireme that had brought that city's envoys and had not yet had time to pack and leave for the journey home.

Whether this had been a deep-died plot or just the venomous response usual when rich men find their property threatened, the insurgents now knew they must redefine their murderous assault into a political act. Wanting to choke off their enemies' support base, they convened an assembly to make the case that their bloody interruption of the city government had been forced on them as patriots because the people they had eliminated had turned the people of Corcyra into chattels bound to Athens. The path these determined oligarchs had taken had been convoluted, and it is possible their plan had been gestating for some time. That it was well coordinated is suggested by the fact that, shortly after the takeover, a Corinthian trireme carrying Spartan officers arrived in port. With this muscle behind them, the oligarchs started a political cull, attacking their enemies in the streets. Now those under threat had little option but to take to the barricades. The popular party mobilised support, and fought their way up the streets to the acropolis and other high parts in the town. The oligarchs failed to keep tight hold of these important positions. Rather than thinking about strategy, they were more interested in sending their bravos out to kill any rivals they could find in the city's alleyways.

It was a real war of sections now, with the oligarchs in command of the *agora*, where most of them had their houses, and the main harbour, while the crowds of populars held the area of the high town and around the Hyllaic harbour, to the north of the acropolis. It was no holds barred, with both sides sending out murder squads to attack any opponents they could find, while their agents went out into the country to try and recruit the rural folk. Both sides offered freedom to any slaves who would join them, and, understandably enough, it was the democrats rather than the major slave-owning oligarchs who gained the most recruits. The men with the money made up for the deficit by pooling their ample funds and recruiting 800 out-of-work mercenaries, who were hanging about the mainland looking for employment. It was turning into a people's war in the town, and the women even pitched in, throwing whatever they could find down on any of the oligarchs or their retainers that moved around outside. Street fighting was messy stuff, with houses as fortresses. Most had mud brick walls on stone foundations, and the sides that faced the street usually had only small high-up windows. Some had second floors as well to give height, and their roofs were good elevated places to defend. They were also ammunition dumps, with tiles that might weigh up to seventy pounds available as lethal missiles for the garrisons holding them. And in this domestic battleground non-combatants like women and slaves might turn out as effective auxiliaries. By the evening of the second day the oligarchs realised they had bitten off more than they could chew. Almost every hand not actually in their hire was raised against them, and when it looked like their enemies would gain control of the arsenal, they really lost their nerve.

They were shrewd enough to know that the popular party, if they got control of the arsenal, by arming their greater numbers would be unstoppable. To prevent this, they turned incendiary, setting fire to the *agora* and the houses around, to frustrate their rivals. Many parts of the city caught fire, and if the wind had been stronger, the whole place would have gone up in smoke. But at least it brought an end to the combat, as on both sides people dropped their arms to make an effort to staunch the flames. Night put the seal on the cessation of fighting, as everybody settled down to try and get some sleep amongst the ashes. Also, the oligarchs had eyes, and they by now had realised they could not prevail, and the only chance of survival lay in evacuation. The main men slipped down to the docks to get away on the Corinthian ship that was still in the harbour, while the lesser folk

and the hired hands crammed into any boat available to take them over to the mainland.

The Athenians had not left well alone when Corcyra exploded. A man named Nicostratus, son of Diitrephes, had been in command at Naupactus, and he launched twelve triremes filled with 500 Messenian hoplites, and set off for the civic maelstrom. Once on hand, with his ships and soldiers at the ready, this new man tried to make sense of the mess of communal turmoil he found. Calling men from the factions together, he tried to persuade them to return to the status quo ante, when a coalition administration had kept Corcyra fairly stable, and, crucially, an active ally of the Athenians. The ten worst offenders in the attack on the councilmen would need to be brought to book, but this should not cause too much of problem as they were already well away from the city and could not be easily laid hands on. With this accommodation arrived at, the mediator prepared to return to base when the popular party people asked him to leave them some muscle in case the oligarchs changed their minds and again tried a coup. It was settled that five Athenian triremes should remain to guarantee the recently-constructed communal cooperation, but, so their subtraction should not weaken Nicostratus' task force, the Corcyraeans agreed to put five of their ships at his disposal to sail with the remaining seven.

This apparently innocuous swap now became the catalyst for the overthrow of what seemed to have been settled. It became clear that the democrats had their own advantage in mind when the lists were published of those conscripted to man the ships. Most named were their own virulent domestic rivals, and these oligarchs, worried by the Athenian-brokered compromise, were now certain they had been duped. It was rumoured the five triremes were not going to Naupactus at all but back to Athens, where the crews would be clapped in irons and not allowed to return home, to forever strangle the life out of the already failing pro Spartan party in Corcyra. So, instead of accepting this grim enlistment, some of those picked out to serve fled for sanctuary in the temple of the Dioscuri. These celestial horsemen, sons of Leda, were reputed patrons of sailors but whether they would be effective in these fractured times must have been very much in the minds of the refugees as they arrived at the holy portals with just a few possessions. The popular party were in arms, and hot for blood when they found that these hated people were refusing to man the city's ships. Even the Athenians found it difficult to keep them in

check when they had so many scores to settle against a delinquent faction they now branded traitors. All the rest of the oligarchs and their families, over 400 of them, feeling very vulnerable, also looked for sanctuary, and at least temporarily found it at the temple of Hera, north of the Hyllaic harbour. But they were not allowed to stay long. There was a small uninhabited island across the bay from the temple, and soon the whole lot were transported across to it. These were desperate people but still why they agreed to go is something of a mystery. Perhaps they believed themselves safer there than in the city with a mob running riot in the streets. Once landed, these pathetic refugees were kept supplied either by the city authorities or friends and family who had remained at liberty in the town.

This was the situation that Brasidas and Alcetas heard of when they arrived in the area after a short cruise from Cyllene, less than a week since the oligarchs had been shipped to the island. Their squadron, fifty-three triremes strong, anchored on the mainland near the Sybota islands to take stock of what they were getting themselves into. This was a sleepy place with few habitations about, and the men in the fleet divided the work of throwing up a defended beach camp and going off to local markets to purchase food. These trireme fleets carried little in the way of supplies in their narrow packed hulls, and any stop would entail having to find, nearby, the wherewithal for survival. There were probably little less than 15,000 men bustling round the summer beach, setting up a stockade, and laying out the lines of tents. Others were off looking for residents who could take them to the wells, where they might fill their wine skins and jugs with water. The ships bobbed on the shore's edge, sterns facing inland and the prows out as a sort of defence, while lookouts tried to ensure they were not surprised from the sea, and scouts were sent inland to guarantee there was no danger from that direction. The camp they established commanded the approaches to Corcyra harbour from the south, at the narrowest point between the mainland and most southerly tip of the island. It was well positioned for the attack they commenced on the following dawn.

When they heard of the enemy advancing from Sybota, the Corcyraeans were true to form, despite the Athenians being on hand to try and stop their allies falling to bits before the fight. Immutable problems quickly surfaced down in the port. Reports emerged of divisions on the ships. Many of the captains were richer men, and were often tainted with oligarchic connections. As for the crews, these

sailors were always the heart and soul of the popular party; they worried that while their officers accepted the orders of the government now, they might not be able to trust them when it came to a fight. Would their hearts be in it against the Spartans? Would they be tempted to take their ships over to the other side? These men and their officers might be overawed by the presence of the Athenians while in port but what might they do when on the open sea? The popular party and their Athenian friends were like a bee hive stirred with a stick when they realised that the enemy armada had arrived. Despite being aware of the discord on the ships, the city's leaders were keen to fight. Perhaps they hoped that facing a common enemy might cement divisions. They were resolute, and gave orders to mobilise as soon as they could, to man their own sixty ships and match what the enemy had on offer. Any *trierarchs* in two minds about fighting the Spartans had to, for the moment at least, counterfeit enthusiasm if only to protect their own hides.

But if the response of those in charge was enthusiastic, it was also messy, incoherent stuff that worried the Athenian professionals on hand, as they watched their allies' disorderly efforts to deploy their ships. These experienced officers advised that they should take their own already-manned triremes out, to delay the Peloponnesians, and by doing so allow the locals to get their vessels equipped and deployed in the proper approved way. But these hometown enthusiasts were having none of it, and, one at a time, the trireme commanders slipped their charges into the water and out of the port, just as each was manned and ready. So, when they arrived at the fight, they were straggling badly, each out behind the other, not in an orthodox supportive battle line. In fact, it was worse than just disorder, and division started to show in the most dramatic way. Two ships crewed largely by men inclined to the oligarch faction, when they got near the enemy, left their own side and rowed hell for leather to join up with Alcidas and his fleet. And on other ships, where the sailors and marines were evenly mixed in their allegiances, they even started fighting each other on their decks and rowing benches.

On the other side it was very different. These men had been together for a long time, and knew each other's ways. Captains and crews might be from places as different as Corinth, Cythera or Sicyon, but, after months and miles from the Aegean to the Ionian Sea, they had learned to work together with great efficiency. Brasidas and Alcidas, seeing their shambolic opponents approaching, were ready.

Their captains had dumped what would be a hindrance on shore, and now sails and rigging were piled in the camp with just a few men left to guard them. Oarsmen and marines were well fed, and at their posts. They had launched out for a fight, pushing the slight and frail shells of their triremes into a placid blue sea. Only low waves broke on the millpond surface as the warships filled the expanse of water between the Sybota islands and Corfu itself, waiting for the enemy to come into sight. This would be no cat and mouse affair. The Peloponnesians did not feel any need for cunning ploys now their ships were crewed by, if not quite Athenian standard, adept oarsmen and their marines of the very best quality the Greeks produced.

Did the Peloponnesian chiefs have an inkling of what was approaching them? It would beggar belief, in these fractious times, that the Spartans did not have agents in the town, or indeed that they would not have been in contact with sympathetic men in the Corcyraean navy. Their fleet had not been at Sybota long but surely long enough for contacts to have crossed the straits in small boats, to report and receive instructions from Spartan intelligence agents. So, even if they were not depending on treachery to rend their enemies' ranks, it would not be a surprise if it occurred. When the chiefs saw the ragged fashion in which the enemy fleet was approaching, they recognised, immediately, that the greatest danger they had to face would come from the twelve Athenian ships. These were the best that city had, and included the civic vessels, the Salaminia and the Paralus, that carried out key official and ceremonial roles, representing the maritime soul of the city. So, it was against these that the Peloponnesian commanders decided to launch the majority of the fleet, thirty-three of their warships. Their marines had buckled on their bronze helmets, and archers made sure their supplies of arrows were secure, as the oarsmen carried on the pads of filled sheepskin to protect their rumps. But, apart from these, they carried little else as they climbed the rungs of the ladders let down for them; it might be only eight odd feet up to the deck but it was still difficult to ascend with any excess paraphernalia. The oarsmen had pulled away with confidence from the shore's edge, laved by placid water and still cooled by a sea breeze so early in the day. There may well have been some combatants present from the Corinthian allies, who had been in that fight at Sybota six odd years before. And if they had not actually triumphed then, now they were part of a veteran, well-led force, confident in its ability to take on whatever the locals and the small auxiliary force of Athenians might throw at them. Pre-battle rituals,



such as the sacrifice of animals, were gone through before they launched, and the officers took post ready to carry out the orders that had been given them. Brasidas kept tight hold to the rails on his own afterdeck, Trireme commanders had been thrown into the sea before with the shock of impact that might be expected when the battle began.

Only twenty Peloponnesian warships had been ordered to range themselves on the right against the Corcyraeans, but this smaller squadron were still confident they could cope with the disorganized enemy streaming out of the military port of Corcyra town. Their analysis was almost immediately shown to be sound when the two lead vessels, which, having descended the channel between the island and the mainland and rounded Cape Lefkimme, declined to fight and gave signals that they wanted to come over. These deserters passed through the Spartan line, and if they did not turn to fight their fellow citizens, then at least they were lost to the cause. And this was not the only problem. The communal differences and enmities, which had been graphically shown on land, had also been transferred to the water. The Peloponnesians saw, on some of the enemy ships, that the crews, now armed for battle, had turned their weapons against each other. These faction fighters were bloodying the waters around Corcyra even before they made contact with the enemy.

The Athenians, probably in the place of honour on the right, had come on with their accustomed confidence and order. These were the same men who had overcome greater odds in the recent fights near Patrae and Naupactus, and there was plenty of open water between the island and mainland for them to show their superior expertise. They recognised they were considerably outnumbered in their quarter of the field and knew they must guard against being surrounded. To ensure this did not occur, the centre ships did not push forward to attack but, instead, those on the wings demonstrated how the *periplous* was done. This version of the manoeuvre involved flanking one end of the enemy line and coming back, to take the last ship in the rear or flank. These mariners knew how to express themselves. The first target was holed and sunk, and the Peloponnesians opposing the Athenians suddenly began feeling clumsy and vulnerable faced with an enemy of superior expertise. They decided to form in a defensive circle with their remaining thirty-two vessels, so once again the Athenians found themselves faced with the same puzzle as they had at the battle off Patrae, and again they tried the same remedy. Their twelve triremes

began to row round the circled enemy, feigning sometimes to attack and trying to squeeze the compact defenders tighter and tighter. The circle kept formation but it was difficult and nerve-racking as the steersmen, pilots and boatswains made every effort to ensure the ships did not foul each other.

The combat again illustrated the Athenians' advantage. For a second recent time a much larger Peloponnesian fleet had had to laager up against a small Athenian one. That men as sea savvy as the Corinthians could only conceive of sitting in a circle and giving the intuitive totally to the enemy is telling. They could imagine no other picture in their head, no other tactic to face such a superior opponent. Even if they had drawn up in a double line, as they had the numbers to do, it would not have washed. The enemy they were facing were so swift and nimble that if they came in on the flank of the first line of such a formation they would have been able to ram and get back out, or knock off their oars and retreat, before the second-line vessels could intervene and take them in the flank. Or, employing the *diekplous*, when they came through the gaps in the line, they could have hit and run in the same way. This would be like a small group of nimble and brilliant fencers against a mob of cudgel-bearing yokels, who, although they had the numbers, could be herded and chivvied just as the more expert fighters wished. Several encounters since the battle at Sybota in 433 BC had made abundantly clear Athenian superiority at this stage of the war. The feeling in the reports of that earlier battle was that the Corinthians were deeply old fashioned, depending on trying to fight a land battle on the water. They expected their marines and archers to do the tough work, against an enemy who used ships and rams as their key weapon. These factors did not always ensure victory over numbers, as luck or the failures of their allies could weigh in the balance, but this ascendancy did remain, for at least another decade of war on the water.

These Athenians and their enemies were facing prow to prow now, with the Spartans' vessels poking out and the Athenian dodging in, looking for an opening. The more manoeuvrable attackers were threatening, but the Peloponnesians kept up a steady front, and the men aboard were hopeful their friends would soon come to their assistance. The archers on deck could let fly when they saw a target on the approaching enemy decks or benches, but this was about all they could do as the action developed in a nerve-wracking fashion. Waiting there, in fear of their nimble enemies ramming anybody who

showed vulnerable when they fouled a neighbour, or were pushed about by the wash of waves, was dispiriting for the defenders. They had started so well, looking for an easy triumph when Corcyraeans deserted or began to fight each other. And all the time, Brasidas and Alcidas knew there was the danger that the contest might degenerate into a general melee, with some subordinate taking the initiative, having grown tired of waiting in the circle. And if this happened their ships would be picked off in detail.

The decision making of the Corcyraean command is not at all clear. All we know is what happened. History showed these Greek navies were capable of clever and complicated tactics, but not this time. The whole complement just barrelled down the strait aiming for the Sybota islands, where they knew the enemy was coming from. Despite a handful of desertions and some of their crews fighting with each other, logic told that numbers were likely to impact in the end. They must have had at least double the twenty Peloponnesian triremes facing them, though how they deployed is not reported. The likelihood is they arranged themselves in a double line. They had the numbers to do so, and this would stop the enemy from easily breaking through. It would also allow them to protect their own flanks and possibly turn their opponents, coming in on the stern quarter of the ships at the end of the opposing line. The smaller Peloponnesian squadron almost certainly kept to the less open water near Sybota itself, where small islands could have covered one flank and at least stopped that side being enveloped. However they did it, the smaller force achieved great things. They darted in and out and were threatening, even if they could not or did not dare break through the main cordon. For quite some time, they kept the larger force of islanders off balance.

The Corcyraeans may have been eager to get into the battle in the beginning but there seemed to be considerably less aggression when they reached the enemy. This was despite a noteworthy naval tradition amongst the island marine. What had gone on at Corcyra recently must have affected morale. The richer men, who provided the *trierarchs* here as in most navies, were held in suspicion as potential oligarchs by the oarsmen, so the kind of discipline absolutely required to make a trireme function efficiently would just not have been present, with so many class and faction lines wracking the polity. With the enemy almost in smelling distance, it was a stomach-churning experience, from the generals balanced on the sterns of the flagships

to the lowest *thalamite* oarsman, and confidence must have suffered. Fear was palpable as the fighting became general all over the placid waters of the strait. This warfare on the water was so different from a straightforward phalanx encounter. The dependable man on the right protecting his comrade just could not be counted on as the hulls, which churned in the water, with enemies driving in, unbalanced anybody trying to stand on the deck. Shields were of little use when arrows and spears came rattling in from every angle, and even if a marine was adept enough to get within spear's length of a foe then the thrust he made might as easily end with him unbalancing into the sea as finding the enemy's flesh. And, perhaps worst of all, there was nowhere to run if their vessel was breached or taken by boarders. There was only the water, and as few could swim this was certain death, unless a passing spar or barrel could be grabbed.

Fighting was furious on this wing. There was carnage and commotion mixed with selfless heroism, battle madness taking many, while others coolly took the action required to stave off disaster as an enemy clambered over the deck side rails. But, whatever the details, the upshot was abundantly clear when the Peloponnesian squadron on the other wing, which was still tightly encircled, wildly signalled for rescue. The twenty warships facing the Corcyraeans were sufficiently in the ascendancy to be able to disengage and manoeuvre to try and save their friends. Enough of them backed away from the fray and redeployed. Then, rowing hard, they arrived, glistening beaks cleaving the water and pointing ominously at the Athenians, forcing them to leave their circling prey alone and turn their own prows to face the new threat that had materialised. This was a necessary response but one that inevitably allowed the two Peloponnesian parties the time and space to join together and redeploy into a single battle line. The Athenian commanders, however confident in their crews' skills they were, now found themselves massively outnumbered, and with no sign of their allies coming to help them it looked like they would have to fight alone as the enemy fleet not far off fifty strong, 'bore down' on their lonely twelve.

The high hills on the nearby land acted as a natural amphitheatre, and from the heights there now stretched out a confused panorama of nimble and gaudy triremes, in groups or singly sparring with each other. The noise of paeans being raised, and trumpets blaring, echoed across the water for what must, for the combatants, have seemed an unconscionably long time. But after the redeployment of the

Peloponnesian left wing, a pattern inevitably emerged. With the Athenians hugely outnumbered and no longer holding the initiative, and with the island ships in a mess, all they could hope for now was for an orderly fading back to the defended harbour of Corcyra. In the withdrawal, the Athenians still took most of the flak, slowly backing water to allow their awkward and vulnerable allies to get to safety before them. Missile men flinging at each other, feints and attempted ramming continued until the sun went down, but for all the Athenians' good efforts they could not save every one of the ships of their friends. Some of the straggling vessels were captured, with little resistance. We hear of no casualties for Brasidas and his side in this phase of the fight. As the afternoon hours waned, the combat spattered on. Then, only as the sun went down, could the Corcyraeans begin to relax as all fighting petered out, and both sides withdrew to count the cost.

Night showed the Peloponnesians, on the Sybota beach with fires burning bright, meat sizzling and wineskins broached in celebration, and looking forward to building a victory trophy in the morning. Thirteen Corcyraean vessels, it turned, out had been captured, at the end of the day. The success must have made most of the men feel that city itself could be ripe for the plucking. What the actual involvement of Brasidas or Alcetas had been we do not know. Had the former delivered an address to the fighters on the decks of their ships before the battle as at Naupactus? Commanders are frequently reported calling on the shades of community heroes or on the reputations of the combatants' forbears, as examples to copy and as providers of reputations that should not be tarnished. But whether they addressed the men or not, there was excitement in the air as the chiefs took their places. Alcetas, the titular head, odds on was holding the place of honour on the right, and if so then Brasidas was most likely posted on the other wing. Wherever they had positioned themselves, the outcome suggests both had done well handling their sections of the line, whether against an expert Athenian enemy or disorganized islanders.

Before deciding on the next move, the high command debated the options in the public tent, where it soon became clear there were divisions. Brasidas argued hard for a direct assault on Corcyra the following day, before the enemy could reorganize their defence, but found his admiral less than eager. It was like the Mytilene expedition all over again. There is an issue of what exactly Brasidas' status was in

the command setup. Called a councillor, he clearly could not overrule Alcetas on campaign, but that man knew he had to take note of the advice given or he might suffer for it once they both got home and reported to the Spartan authorities. But whatever the exact mechanism, the dilatory man officially in command had the final say. All that Alcidas was prepared to attempt was to sail over and land at Cape Lefkimme, on the southern end of the island, and smash up what the men could lay their hands on. This was certainly satisfying and lucrative as the loot piled up, but was much less than Brasidas, for one, had intended. And the admiral's attitude did not get any more adventurous when news came in that the Corcyraeans had put their port in a state of defence, and managed to get thirty ships into fighting shape. Then on top of this, beacon signals made it known that sixty more Athenian warships had rounded Leucas island, and were not far away from their base at Sybota. This number of triremes, under the Athenian admiral Eurymedon, was bound to turn the tables dramatically. After their arrival they alone would be able to field seventy vessels against the Peloponnesian fifty-three, and that apart from those the allies could still deploy. Spooked by the threat of these numbers, in the middle of the night Alcidas ordered his captains to pack up camp and slip as quietly as possible out into the strait and south, keeping close to the shore. Worrying that the enemy might be on his tail, he aimed for where the island of Leucas joined the mainland, as there it was possible to make a portage over the narrow neck of land and keep well ahead of any enemy coming west round the island. All the time, they would be keeping anxious eyes open on the empty sea behind, in the hope it did not fill with enemy vessels. This commander had again lost his nerve in a situation where he still had a good chance of success. To many it smacked exactly of his attitude in the Aegean campaign. Whatever Brasidas said had failed to put backbone into Alcidas, and clearly his remit did not allow him to overrule the admiral when it came to it.

All these ups and downs of fortunes had become too much for the people in power and their supporters in Corcyra. They had become unhinged by the stress of faction politics on the island over the recent weeks. Assassination, rapine and bloody battle had become the order of the day for everybody, and nerves were being stretched. So when news arrived that Athenian friends were on their way in strength and the Peloponnesian threat at least temporarily raised they decided to act. The oligarchs on the island in the bay had already been brought back to the city and located in the temple of Hera, and now, calling in

the Messenian hard men, who had come with the Athenians, they took control of the northern harbour. There, with their own and their allies' ships and soldiers behind them, the decision was taken to properly dispose of their political rivals. They murdered all the enemies they could find in the town, and those who were still on board the warships were set down on the shore, where groups of killers waited to cut them down. Those at the temple were the next target. Fifty of them were persuaded to accept trial at the courts, where they got short shrift, being immediately dispatched for execution. After this news got back to the rest, they determined not to go quietly to the executioner's knife but rather to commit suicide. Some hanged themselves, while others fell on swords held by their comrades, or found other ways to end their lives. All in all, it was a week of butchery, as the people in charge were given confidence by the might of Athenian navy at their back, that not only allowed political grievances to be expunged but personal grudges to be sorted out too. It was awful. People were killed by those who owed them money. Claims of fathers killed by sons were not unheard off, and supplicants were dragged from altars to be slaughtered. Some who had gone to the temple of Dionysius for sanctuary were walled up and left until they starved to death.

It had been a week of butchery but not even everybody of the popular party was convinced by the efficacy of this massacre, particularly when it seemed unable to provide a stable solution to governance on the prosperous island. When the Athenians left and the populars' stranglehold loosened a little, oligarchs in hiding, and the remnants of the ex-prisoners of war who had started the whole sequence, began to raise their heads. Many of these were noblemen who had been the absolute authority on their country estates and in the rural villages, so they were not going to be excluded from power in the city while they retained even the remnants of such clout outside. Hiding with friends on their farms, they made contact with supporters keeping their heads down in town, and began to organize. Arms were procured, boats were hired, and 500 of them ferried themselves across the few miles of seawater to the mainland, and swiftly took over or built forts as a defended base. From behind these palisade and stone embrasures, they not only could control the Corcyraean mainland territory, but they planned a campaign of revenge against the men who had, in the last few weeks of summer, despoiled them not only of power but their possessions too. After sending off representatives to Sparta and Corinth to beg for armed

support, they used the money they had collected from their adherents to hire about 100 mercenaries and the transports needed to take them back to the island. Two thousand years before Cortez, these putative conquistadors, upon landing, also burned their boats, so their supporters would know they had come to conquer or die. They disembarked at the north end of the island where there was difficult high country all around, and determined on Mount Istone as the best place to set up as the nerve centre of rebellion. There again, they dug in behind stone and palisade defences, before settling down to ruining the productive country around. Their plan was to deny food to the people in the city, and prepare a place for friends and supporters to congregate and join the revolutionary army they were building.

But far from becoming a launching pad for these persistent reactionaries, Mount Istone was a final chapter. The populars were enjoying power without these bitter men of blood being around, and, when Eurymedon came back with a considerable fleet in summer 425 BC, they joyously turned to eradicate them completely. With the Athenian ships and troops eagerly deputised, they all combined to attack the rugged bastion on the far northeast of the island. It was soon all over, as the attackers had come in just too much strength, and a ragged remnant of the defenders finally surrendered to the Athenians after flying to even higher ground in the hope of finding safety. Now it was just repetition as the prisoners kept safe were shipped to an offshore island called Ptychia. But, like the other one in Corcyra bay, it proved no salvation, the local authorities were not about to let these inveterate enemies live and by allowing some boats to fall into their hands they arranged for them to be captured trying to escape. By the attempt to get away, they lost the protection of the Athenians who washed their hands of the business, leaving some of the captives to be forced to run a gauntlet of men, on the lookout for personal enemies, who beat and stabbed them to death. After sixty were dealt with in this way, the rest barricaded themselves in their prison. They were to be finished off by antagonists who got on the roof and killed those below with arrows or roof tiles, with only any women left being enslaved. When night had fallen, the massacre was concluded, and the pro-Spartan oligarchs had reaped the final bloody crop from the seeds of death they themselves had sown.

This gory business at Corcyra is claimed as a pattern of a general and vicious disintegration of normal community relations all over Greece in this war. This was a blueprint that saw the tensions of open



war render the normal compromises of politics unsustainable, and extreme party strife the norm. Personal ambition was trumping family and clan loyalty in a way deeply distressing to the Athenian traditionalist who is our main source of information, and whose belief was that government was best when it was in the hands of men of property. He, like many, looked with equal horror on the seeds of anarchy, whether they were sown by the richest men eager to return to the days of aristocratic supremacy or those lower down the social order determined on equality for all male citizens. Many of these, oppressed by years of debt, were determined to take the opportunity to dispose of those who held ownership of their promissory notes. The key that had unlocked this Pandora's box is seen as the war between Sparta and Athens, a conflict that had meant, for each of these factions, that there were now powerful outside sponsors who might be brought in with ships, men and money to sustain, in domestic power, the folk whose attitudes most ideologically fitted their own. So, while the class and faction bile may have existed before, it was the preparedness of the Spartans to prop up their oligarchic friends, and the Athenians to do the same for democratic rivals, that brought these matters so bloodily to the surface.

But, whatever the long-term effects of this existential predicament, brought on by treachery and party vitriol, were to the average Athenian, the return of the plague was a more immediate concern. This time, it was in winter of 327–326 BC that it hit the hardest, and nature was giving even further warnings of what perilous times these were with repeated earth tremors. The earth's undulating crust reduced houses to rubble, and ominous clouds of dust lay like mist over the landscape where these quakes had occurred. There was continuous rumbling. Lurching ground and tsunamis were reported at Orobiae in Euboea and along the coast of Locrian Opontus, with habitations disappearing under water, with many who could not get away drowning. Athenians and Boeotians were all overcome with a pervading sense of dread, and it even upset the Spartans enough for them to cut short the annual wrecking of the Attic homeland, sending these superstitious people back home in double-quick time. Yet still these natural disasters hardly gave any pause to people who had for most of half a decade pulled out every stop to bring the other to its knees.

Despite doom and gloom, characters who had been deeply involved at Corcyra remained active and engaged. Eurymedon, who had looked

on while the oligarchs were massacred, would soon be involved in a cranking up of Athens' efforts in Italy and Sicily, and the very man who had showed so poorly in tandem with Brasidas was about to redeem himself when it came to other duties his city fathers laid on him. And the results of his endeavours were in a direction, and indeed along an exact route, that Brasidas would take very soon. Alcidas must have spun his record around Corcyra pretty well, and it may be that his lack of ambition played to a constituency in Sparta who saw themselves as the guardians of a tradition that her people should stay at home. These 'little Peloponneses' saw to the demise of characters like the kings, Cleomenes and Demaratus, as well as the regent Pausanias, exiling them or worse because they saw them as dangerous men who engaged too adeptly with a contaminating outside world. These were the kind of Spartans who saw the use of money as a blight on the good timbre of the Laconic spirit, and who later encompassed the sentencing to death of a war hero found with silver hidden in the eaves of his house.<sup>1</sup> They were not a group in sympathy with Brasidas but these people, and there were plenty of them, may have provided the continuous support that kept Alcidas in favour. His next project though does, perhaps, contradict this a little as it took him north out of the Peloponnese, as part of a team pushing a major endeavour the following year. Alcidas had not returned home trailing glory but his career prospects hardly seemed to have wobbled before he was off again.

The Trachinians who lived near the Malian gulf had been harried by some neighbours from Oetaea for years<sup>2</sup> and, after losing many citizens in the fighting, a deserted site was offered to the Spartans, a people they claimed as kin, if they would come and defend it. Alcidas, in the summer 426 BC, accompanied by a man called Leon, another called Damagon and 4,000 others was dispatched in response to the plea for help. Their mission was to plant a colony at Heraclea in Trachis, a few miles west of Thermopylae. It would long remain an important Spartan stronghold in central Greece and a base for influencing events on the island of Euboea. This was a place that commanded the seaways north to the rich and beckoning frontier country of Macedonia and Thrace. They were quickly joined by 6,000 more Greek colonists, all of whom were allotted land, establishing a place named from the hero who both the Trachinians and the Spartan claimed as ancestor. The foundation remained a key northern post for Spartan power, sometimes lost but always retaken, until the 360s when the rise of Thebes penned them back into the Peloponnese for

good. This look north would very soon involve Brasidas who had returned with the fleet when it came home from Corcyra. What he did in the year Alcidas turned colonist we have no way of knowing. The only hint is that the next time he enters the picture it is in command of a trireme, so it is not improbable he remained with the navy based at Cyllene.

## *Chapter Five*

### **An Island at the Centre**

Goatherds tending their flocks in the broken ruins of Nestor's palace would have had plenty to see, as they drove their animals on a vertiginous descent towards the sea, in early summer of 425 BC. Descending the hills, they saw tens of triremes covering the waters like a cloud of water boatmen, and antlike figures of soldiers and sailors building walls and ditches. These country folk were witnessing the commencement of a campaign almost begun by accident, but one that in the end mattered hugely. There was a portico in the Athenian Agora where a mural reminded the Athenians of the military glory of the past. The depiction of Marathon was commissioned by Cimon in an effort to advertise himself through the achievements of his father, Miltiades. To have pictured his own victories would have looked too much like hubris. This battle was special for the people, showing as it did that, even fighting alone, they were up to the sternest military test. This was despite the fact that, unlike the Spartans, they did not completely dedicate their society to producing warriors. The men of Marathon had always been seen as true Athenians of old to aspire to, but now a process opened that would show that their descendants might not only be the equals of the Spartans but might even be able to better them in combat.

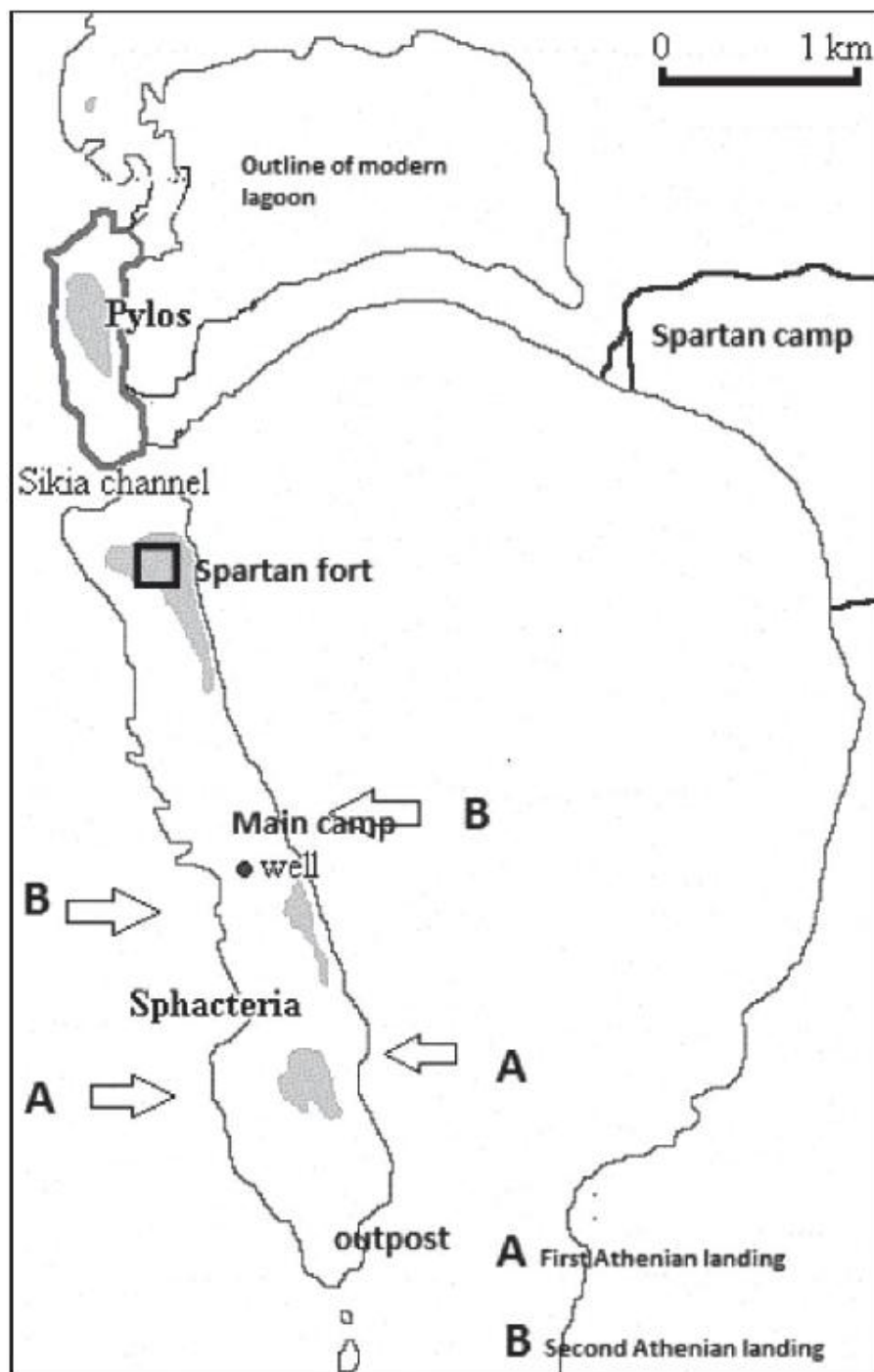
Few at Athens had thought about Pylos, a promontory on the southwest coast of the Peloponnese, when priorities had been decided upon for that year's fighting. The main strategic direction of travel was the northwest to strengthen what were seen as key fronts. First, at Corcyra where the enemy were again making trouble, with a fleet of sixty ships, and eventually Sicily where Sparta's ally Syracuse was threatening the position of Athens and her friends at the city of Messene, that commanded the straits across to the toe of Italy. Forty triremes were dispatched to this western war, under the usual team of commanders. Eurymedon and Sophocles are specified as the 'remaining generals', showing the others of the ten elected for the year had already gone out on other missions. Indeed Pythodorus had been sent ahead to Sicily to pave the way. Eurymedon had commanded in the Ionian Sea before in 428 BC, but had not done a great deal, and, apart from a raid on Tanagra in Boeotia the next year, this was the first opportunity he had to make a name for himself. Sophocles

equally had no great military past, and both would eventually suffer for what was considered a poor show in this campaign. But these two were accompanied by another officer who would soon have a crucial contribution to make, and had had an interesting recent history.

The year before, the summer of 426 BC, had seen the plague return to Athens, and there were earthquakes in Attica and Boeotia. In this same season, Brasidas' old colleague Alcidas was planting a colony at Heraclea for the Spartans, when another man, who would be considerably involved with his career, appears. This was Demosthenes, who had led one prong of a two-pronged effort despatched from Athens at that time. While Nicias, son of Niceratus, commanded a larger force of sixty warships with 200 citizen hoplites against the island of Melos, Demosthenes, with his colleague Procles, circumnavigated the Peloponnese with only thirty triremes. Passing between Zacynthus Island, and the mainland, they managed to arrive in the vicinity of Leucas islands without the enemy being aware of them. The bonus of this circumspection was that, at Ellomenus, they discovered an unprepared guard outfit who they swiftly eradicated.

Demosthenes called out the levy of old friends from Acarnania to join up with him, and, soon after, fifteen ships from Corcyra came in. These were supplemented by others from Athens' allies on Zacynthus and Cephalonia. This was a real build up, and the Leucanians were only able to watch as the enemy laid waste the country and began to prepare siege lines. These included walls cutting off the town of Leucas, which sat on the isthmus connecting the island to the mainland. The Acarnanians, very bitter against their local rivals, urged Demosthenes to build a proper stone barrier to thoroughly isolate the town. But there were others whispering in the general's ear too. Messenians from Naupactus, who had recently joined the expedition, argued that the Aetolians were ripe for the taking. They claimed their overthrow would reinforce Naupactus' security, and would give them uncontested control of the country inland and west along the Gulf of Corinth, and also that they would be a walkover as their army was largely made up of light infantry. The newcomer was persuaded, and not only decided on conquering these people but may have had a grand strategy in mind about invading Boeotia from the west, that he would end up trying in a few years time. But that was the future, and the immediate programme called for his allies to rendezvous at Sollium, across the strait from Leucas. Once together, there was dissention. The Acarnanians did not want to let their local enemies of

the hook, and would not go, so the armament that finally took to the invasion road included only Messenians, Cephelonians, Zacynthians as well as 300 Athenian marines from Demosthenes' ships.



Map 6: Sphacteria Island.

To kick things off they shipped back into the Gulf of Corinth to Oeneon, ten miles east of Naupactus in Ozolian Locris. The people there were important because, like the enemy, they mainly fought as light infantry, and could meet the Aetolians on their own terms as well as being familiar with the country the army would need to pass through. Demosthenes kept under canvas for a time on the border of Aetolia, near a place where the poet Hesiod is reputed to have met his end at the hands of some locals. Aetolian towns had been advertised as not to be well fortified, and the early stages of the campaign seemed to bear this out. Breaking camp at dawn, the invaders marched, captured a place called Potidania, then, on the second day, another, called Krokyle, fell, and on the third Tichium as well. Everything of value they could find was gathered up, and after a few days, was sent back for safekeeping in Locris, not far from Naupactus. Then light-shod Demosthenes cut across country against the Ophionians, an Aetolian tribe who lived north towards the Malian gulf. But before they got as much as ten miles into the country he was to find his arrival had stirred up a real hornets' nest. The locals had now had time to gather, and were waiting while Demosthenes advanced, despite the fact his crucial Locrian auxiliaries had still not joined up. He pushed on north in search of the enemy. Initially they only found the embers of burnt-out camp fires and the detritus of old meals, but at least they knew they were not far behind. Then they reached Aegitium, a town sitting at the bottom of a bowl of hills. The place itself was undefended, and the populace had all run for it, looking to find protection from a defending army massing on the high ground outside. Passing through the built-up area, the heavy infantry and a few archers soon found themselves under attack. The Aetolians descended the hills at a pace, throwing their darts and other missiles in the kind of fighting they were so familiar with. They came on, delivered their projectiles, went back and then came on again using their mobility to thoroughly hound the intruders. The Athenian archers were very effective in replying, but not for long, as their leader was killed and their arrows ran out. After that, the hoplite warriors who expected to crush these raw-meat eaters without trouble, found themselves in all sorts of difficulty. This was a situation made even worse when their Messenian guide, the only man with them who knew the country, was killed.

A setback then turned worse with the routed Athenians losing 120 men, some even burned to death when trapped in wooded country that caught on fire while the rest were chased all the way back to

Naupactus. Once there, Demosthenes' troubles did not end. The Aetolians wanted payback, and, getting the Spartans on board, prepared an attack. The Peloponnesian effort was substantial, led by Eurylochus and several other Spartans with up to 3,000 hoplites, 500 of them coming from the recently-established colony at Heraclea. The defenders were only saved when the Acarnanians sent 1,000 hoplites to reinforce the garrison. It worked. The town was well walled, and the attackers, after wrecking the countryside, allowed themselves to be distracted by the very spot that had started the western war in the first place. The Ambraciots had sent to suggest they join in a rebooted attack on Amphilochean Argos. The war migrated north where two battles showed a proxy bloodletting in this Athens versus Sparta contest. Demosthenes and the commanders of Athenian triremes cruising in nearby western waters joined local allies to face off the Spartan leader, Eurylochus, who had arrived to get behind his Ambraciot friends. For five days, from behind the protection of a ravine, the Athenians and confederates eyeballed the enemy, but on the sixth prepared for battle.

Eurylochus had the greater number of men, and to counter this danger of being outflanked Demosthenes planned a trap. On the right side of his line there was a sunken road and in it he put 400 combined hoplites and light troops, hidden from view behind some convenient bushes. The intention was that, when the enemy's left wing had gone forward beyond them, they should fall on their rear. When the phalanxes clashed, Demosthenes was on the right with his Messenians and a small squad of Athenians, while on the centre and left were the Acarnanians supported by groups of Amphiliot javelin men. On the opposite side, the Peloponnesians and Ambraciots were brigaded together except on the left, where the hoplites from Mantinea were all lined up together, with, on the far left, Eurylochus and his Spartans ready to face Demosthenes. This was unusual not to take the place of honour on the right, showing what importance was placed on going at the Athenian commander head to head. This man's plan now came into play. On his wing the enemy had pressed forward, outflanking him, and passed the sunken road without noticing the men hidden there. They were about to turn to attack Demosthenes' open flank when the ambushade was tripped. Rising up from the bushes, they hurled themselves into the enemies' unprotected backs, slashing into the rear ranks. It was too much. They ran as soon as they could, and the ranks in front panicked too. A very few died where they stood but most just looked for survival, flooding the road to the rear while the



rest hardly came to blows when they saw their best men on the left in flight. Only the Ambraciots did better but they were faced mainly by *peltasts* who were never going to hold in a stand-up fight and these fled all the way to the walls of Argos.

The bloodletting of the pursuit did not fully end until darkness fell, which in wintertime was at least mercifully early. The Peloponnesians found Eurylochus and another Spartan, Macarius, were both amongst the dead. So Menedaius, who had come out with them, had to take command. Cut off by land and sea, his only option was to try to talk his way out but he found himself dealing with tricky customers. The victors agreed to let the general, the Mantineans and most of the other Peloponnesians depart. This produced a double benefit. Their foes would be blamed for leaving their friends in the lurch, and the rest would be left without their best troops. It ended in chaos as those with permission to go slipped away in twos and threes, while the rest who saw them going followed as well, triggering an attack on them all. About 200 were killed, with the residue running for the hills and finding eventual refuge with a local dynast. In the meantime, the main army from Ambracia, not knowing of their comrades' defeat, were on the road, about to find Demosthenes was still on his cunning streak. He marched hard to get to a commanding position on a hill that barred their road south down the gulf coast towards Argos. The advancing force had no scouts out, and did not know that the enemy advance guard was on the hill in front of them, as they camped on a smaller knoll just before it. When the rest of the Athenian allies came up with Demosthenes, they pushed forward ready to attack, despite it being a winter evening. Half the men pressed on with the Athenian general, while the rest went around the enemy camp through the rough hilly country of Amphilochia. The night march meant that in the morning they were placed to act, a trick helped by putting the Messenians in front. These Doric speakers made the Ambraciots think they were friends. But they were not, and bundling past stupefied sentinels they fell upon the sleeping camp. These flawlessly-improvised tactics meant it was mayhem and the death toll was terrific with dozing men cut down in droves, and those not taken at road blocks got lost in unfamiliar hills, or on reaching the coast surrendered to the Athenian ships to avoid being captured by hated local rivals. For the Ambraciots it had been a disaster. No one city suffered more casualties in the war in such a short time. To finish things off, the survivors of the battle were allowed to slink away after giving up hostages for their good faith, while the victors divided the

spoils, of which the Athenians took their share on the ships back to Naupactus.

Demosthenes had, in these campaigns, received a real schooling in the use of light infantry, an education to go with a natural acuity that would hold him in very good stead soon. This was the man who had joined the original commanders of the expeditionary force in 425 BC. He had not been elected general for that year but still had significant political pull; and this despite being under threat of prosecution for the Aetolian debacle. This was something he had been able to part atone for, by bringing back 300 panoplies from his triumph over the Ambraciots to decorate the city temples. Later developments suggest he had backing from Cleon, whose increasing domestic consequence will become clear in the next chapter. This, and possibly that he had already been chosen as general for the next year, had allowed him to attach himself to the expeditionary force with the idea that he might try and do some damage to the enemy along the peninsula coast. Once the fleet had left home waters and rounded the cape, by Methone a squall blew them onto the shore at the headland of Pylos. This place is now a pretty little tourist town but in the fifth century there was just the beach along the sweep of an open bay. Across the mouth of this bay was the long narrow island of Sphacteria that while blocking off much, left one mouth getting on for a mile wide, to the south. To the north, the exit was a very narrow strait indeed. It was north of this Sikia channel, on the mainland, that the Athenians found safety from the storm.

Jumping at his chance, Demosthenes persuaded his comrades to stay and throw up a fort, jerry built with the stones and wood they could gather from round about on the headland, where a cave was named for old King Nestor, and a medieval castle stands today. With plenty of soldiers and sailors available, in six days a wall was cobbled together at Pylos, despite the Athenians hardly having any tools and no hods to carry the mortar. Yet they quickly stockpiled sufficient timber and enough rough hewn blocks for defences to be established, at places vulnerable to attack either from the land or sea. Also, a defended beach head was constructed in good enough a situation to allow five ships to lay up in safety. To build such a stronghold there had probably been Demosthenes' intention all along. His Messenian friends had long alerted him to the strategic significance of this defensible place, with its supply of drinking water. The new-built fortress was ten miles north of Methone, where Brasidas had first

made his name, and more like sixty marching miles from Sparta itself, and Demosthenes had been assured it could be made into a strong post, ideal as a centre from where to raise the oppressed helots of Messene in revolt. It offered them both a bolthole in case of setbacks and a conduit through which the Athenians could support them against their Spartan masters.

But if one Athenian saw its importance, the rest of the officers had their eyes elsewhere, and few could be persuaded to stay after the work itself was completed. The main part of the armada pulled out after six days, heading north to Zacynthus, with Demosthenes seeing them off from the beach. In contrast, a source from several centuries later claims that they stayed twenty days.<sup>1</sup> This is very difficult to believe, as the Athenians knew that a Peloponnesian squadron was already aiding the oligarchs in Corcyra, and they would have wanted to get there to confront them. And, apart from this, even the Spartans would surely not have given them that much time to occupy Pylos before they acted. A makeshift garrison, of five ships and their crews, was left with Demosthenes while the best part of the fleet disappeared over the horizon. These few made their best efforts to prepare for the reaction that was bound to come. The triremes were stockaded under the walls of the fort for their protection, and sailors improvised, making shields for themselves out of osiers. There was good fortune though, for two Messenian privateers arrived just at this time, and their captains agreed to stay on and contribute the considerable number of soldiers and sailors they carried to the defence.

The Spartans had showed their sluggish side when news of this descent on the coast was heard. Here it was very far from a fire brand stuck in an ants' nest. They apparently had a religious festival to organize and, anyway, were confident they could throw out these interlopers whenever they liked. But the threat of mass helot defection centred on this new post began to sink in, and the authorities at Sparta determined to act. The army that had gone as usual to ravage Attica was recalled immediately, while local forces, Perioci and others, near enough to get to Pylos quickly, were redirected. But getting the invasion army back from Attica, and on the road home, was the key. These men had only been in enemy country for fifteen days when they were called back, a departure encouraged by bad weather and lack of provisions due to the corn being green early in the year. Though why they scheduled the invasion for this time when this surely could have been anticipated is never explained. Possibly

spring and summer were late in coming, as clearly the inclement weather was not expected. Once these men had returned, and were available, the reaction to the Pylos incursion was ratcheted up. It was spasms of activity now. Apart from local troops and the main army being got on the road, messengers were also sent on fast ships to Corcyra, with orders for the sixty warships there to get to the battlefield on the first tide under press of sail and oars. Notice was given to the commanders that they were not to be distracted on the journey back, and to ensure this they should take short cuts where they could. They ended up dragging their vessels across the isthmus of Leucas, and slipped secretly passed Zacynthus, where the Athenian fleet that had brought Demosthenes was stationed and might have hindered their progress.

The arrival of the Spartan land forces and the navy was not badly synchronised, but the Athenians knew what the other side was doing. Every village with its disaffected helots leaked information, so Demosthenes, well aware of the crushing forces concentrating to cut him off, got off urgent pleas for help. Two small ships slipped through to Zacynthus Island, where they found the fleet under Eurymedon and Sophocles halted. The messenger boats got away just in time, hours before the Peloponnesian fleet from Corcyra arrived. The Spartan admiral Thrasymelidas with forty-three well-equipped triremes, presumably the rest of the sixty, had remained at Corcyra, and some 12,000 soldiers of the home army set up his headquarters on the open shore of Pylos bay. These Athenian intruders found they had put their head in a lion's mouth, and it looked like it was about to be bitten off. While messengers sought out the fleet to bring them back to help out, the Spartans' forces grew and grew, camping out along the curve of Pylos bay, and in time sending soldiers across to occupy Sphacteria Island. But the Athenian knew what he was doing. From the off he understood there would be a Spartan reaction. This was why he had hurried to defend the post he had persuaded his colleagues to plant on this hostile shore. The arrival of the Messenians had been crucial in making it a possibility that they could get off without being scathed. Amongst them were forty hoplites, who, with as many of his own men, he could get battle ready. They were placed behind the breastwork facing inland, where he knew the enemy would have the most room to attack him. There is now a lagoon at this side, with a very narrow neck of land connecting the Pylos headland to the mainland, but back in the fifth century, with a different sea level, there was probably a less-constricted path above the water. Still, there

was not room on this sand spit for many men to approach abreast, and also where it joined there was a line of cliffs offering a barrier, now reinforced by the work of the defenders. But there were other vulnerable sectors that Demosthenes needed to defend too, on the seaward side and on the Sikia channel where the five warships were drawn up on the beach with a line of palisades driven in to protect them.

The forty Messenian hoplites, with the heavy infantry from Demosthenes' own ships, must have added up to about 100 men, while the rest of the defenders were a few archers and several hundred sailors disembarked from the beached ships. About sixty hoplites and a small force of archers were deployed out beyond the wall, down on the beach, in order to forestall an attack where it would be possible for the enemy to land men from their ships. This was right down by the water's edge, and the men there required encouragement from Demosthenes to stay put in the open at their posts. The rest manned the barricade thrown up to defend the landward approach. So it would be on these two fronts that the battle would be decided. It was in the waterborne assault of triremes packed with assault troops, that Brasidas took a hand. We are told he was in command of one of these warships. But he was surely more than this. Apart from the commander-in-chief, Thrasymelidas, he is the only name mentioned, and two years previously he had been virtually co-commander of a whole fleet. This must be a disjunction of terminology, and if he was not officially in charge of this sector then he was a leader others looked to. It is he who took it on himself to both give orders and shout encouragement. It was needed, for the task given to the attackers looked almost impossible, with a foam sea roiling around the dangerous shore where they were directed to attack. And the approach was narrow too, with rocks and tides making it impracticable to even try to disembark anywhere else along the strand. The only way was to attack in small detachments, hoping to win a beachhead and spread out from there.

The order to go forward was given, and blood was up. The whole fight is couched in epic terms as 'both sides displayed unsurpassable energy', and the detail recalls the fight between the Trojans and Achaeans around the beached black ships in the Iliad. This time, it is Brasidas who is picked out for valour. He knew his comrades attacking on the landward side were not a little dependent on their efforts, so he yelled to the officers in the other ships around that they must beach

their vessels, even if it meant their timbers were stove in and the craft themselves lost. The other captains were not quite so sure of the strategy but, by calling on their pride in country, offended at these intruders in their territory, he persuaded them. The assault troops had to get on shore as if they did not destroy the invaders then the whole Spartan system was at stake. Perhaps this is not such an exaggeration, for there was nothing as dangerous as a centre of helot revolt being established in the heart of Sparta's occupied lands. The mission was to take the fort and destroy the garrison. Leading by example, badgering his own steersman to put his trireme onto the rugged shore, he was the first on the gangway, shield up, spear forward, and yelling his war cry. He tried to get down to the beach but the enemy hoplites pressed back at him, stabbing up at the man above them determined to keep him off, and at the men behind him as well. Brasidas was struck again and again, and if his adrenaline kept him hacking at the enemy below it could not last. Blood loss would be bound to catch up with him eventually. After another arrow hit, he fell full length into the prow of his own boat as his soldiers tried to follow after him. Brasidas passed out, dropping his great war-shield into the sea. The Homeric symbolism is telling. The shield rested in a few inches of water as men cut and thrust over it, to be picked up by the defenders as a trophy when finally blood lust settled and the two sides parted to rest and lick their wounds:

‘having surpassed to such a degree all other men in bravery that, whereas in the case of all other men those who lose their shields are punished with death, he for that very reason won for himself glory.’<sup>2</sup>

For the Spartans, the attack had possessed all the problems of forcing a narrow breach in a city wall, but with the increased difficulty of having to jump off their ships to fight. So no wonder they were driven back, Brasidas did not even get off his trireme onto the beach. He was still on the gangplank as he took the blow that wounded him so severely. It now became clear that what he craved had not been accomplished. His men had tried to leap down and form on the strand but to no avail. The Athenians were indomitable. They held shields and spears firm, and the only enemy who got to the shore got there dead. The Spartans were far more numerous but the places where they could land were so constrained they just could not utilise this superiority. It was a Thermopylae amongst the waves, but this time with no way round, with no traitorous Ephialtes to sell the pass, and eventually the attackers had to accept defeat. The Spartans pulled

back, hoping their friends on the landward side had done better, while Brasidas, bloodied and bowed, slumped over the front rails of his own trireme.

It had actually been little different on the landward approach. Much had been tried while Brasidas bled. The army struggled a distance through the sand dunes to get to the spit of land that led to the enemies' defences. Once there, they saw a bastion clearly cut out against the sky, a sort of cliff with man-made fortifications atop, making the defenders even more difficult to overwhelm. The attackers swarmed forward up the slope climbing out of the hollow, but they could only advance a few abreast, and found the enemy shoulder to shoulder at the top of their wall. The air was split by a blood-curdling war cry, a human cacophony accompanied by the booming of the *salpinx*, a four or five-foot long war trumpet that Homer compared to the cry of Achilles,<sup>3</sup> but the Athenians and Messenians made a bronze-stitched barrier with their shields that just could not be torn down by the few attackers who were able to reach it:

'assaulting the walls with the infantry in successive waves and displaying all possible rivalry, they put up contests of amazing valour'.<sup>4</sup>

Spears in sweaty hands were driven hard by steel-tough warriors from Laconia, but it was still not enough. The defenders behind their botched-up stone defences were solid too and had all the advantages. They were higher up, standing on solid ground, not a sloping cliff where it was difficult to retain a footing for men with feet soaked from wading through the shallows. And behind them they had their light-armed sailors with slings and javelins, and trained bowmen who could rain down missiles on the head of the Spartan column as it tried to press and push up and over the land side defences.

It was all topsy turvy. The Spartans were fighting from the sea, and the Athenians from the land, the very opposite of the elements they favoured. But it had not been a failure of courage or skill, Demosthenes had just constructed a very defensible post on the headland at Pylos. The Spartans did not give up easily either. For two days they continued the attacks, and events did not even slow after each attempt was repulsed by the determined garrison orchestrated by Demosthenes. In fact the attackers only showed increasing resolve, ordering timber to be sent up from stores kept at Asine, on the other side of the Methone peninsula, to 'make siege engines'. What these would have been is not explained, but probably ladders to get over the

walls, and possibly battering rams. Greek skills in siege warfare were of a pretty low quality, and Spartans were often considered the least adept at them. They never used the kind of towers or ramps well known in Asia, and proper artillery, even of the earliest non-torsion sort, was a generation in the future. If they could not get over or batter down defences, the only real alternate plan was to try starving the defenders out.

The Spartans' commanders had spotted a place where even these rudimentary methods might suffice. In the perimeter down by the harbour they had been alerted to a section of the shore where it was easier to land, and, despite the wall being quite high there, they hoped they could get enough men on the ground to force their way in. But, as they were planning this next onslaught, word went up from lookouts that fifty Athenian ships were on the horizon. They were those led towards Corcyra by Eurymedon, and Sophocles had had their numbers boosted by guard ships from Naupactus, and four vessels joining from Chios. This powerful fleet had chased down from Zacynthus after the messengers brought Demosthenes' pleas for help. But, when they saw the shoreline at Pylos and Sphacteria covered with Spartan hoplites, they veered off to find refuge at a nearby deserted island named Prote, eight miles back up the coast. There they took stock, preparing to face the enemy in battle at sea.

The Athenian commanders of the main fleet had responded more quickly than might have been expected from people who had left Demosthenes behind at Pylos so eagerly. That officer's urgings had left little option, and, anyway, they had reliable information that the Peloponnesian squadron at Corcyra, which they had initially been sent out to deal with, was now on its way to confront the men left at the fort. Once returned, and after a night of rest and reorganisation on Prote, they acted decisively. The warships launched, and, cruising down the coast, found the Spartans had made no attempt to block either of the entrances to Pylos bay. Their men could be seen along the shore, readying their warships, clearly intent on a fight within the sheltered waters of the cove. The Athenians were not about to disappoint them, and dividing into two squadrons, approached both to the north and south of Sphacteria island, under orders to engage the enemy. From there, the Spartan garrison watched as battle was joined in Navarino bay where, in over 2,000 years, another epic naval encounter would take place. On that day in 1827 AD the contest between the Ottomans and a Russian, French and British coalition was



one of high-sided timber monsters with great cannons belching smoke, and battering hell out of each other. It was a cacophony of cannons, flame and death, with clouds of gunpowder smoke stitched with the flashes from the muzzles of '24 and 32-pounders'. The encounter here in ancient times, so many centuries before, was very different, if in its way equally horrible. The noise then was the creak of timber, the yells of men and the whistle of arrows. The decibels were considerably less but the terror much the same.

The Spartans had kept their ships on the beach manned and ready, waiting for the Athenians to enter the enclosed waters of the bay. The captains in the Athenian fleet were happy to oblige them, sailing through both entrances at the same time. It was a spine-tingling spectacle, with the sleek and nimble galleys, oars rising and falling like wings, and the curves of their stems and sterns showing elegant beauty, belying how lethal these engines of sea warfare were. One of the things the Athenian officers and men noticed, that must initially have caused them some concern, was that the Spartans had sent 420 men over the water to take control of the long island of Sphacteria. They had been picked by lot from all the regiments in the army, and transferred with their helot servants. Thrasymelidas and the Spartan high command had apparently done this even before the attack on Pylos fort. Why is somewhat hard to understand, as it would lead to the risk of their being captured if the fleet lost control of the sea, and It gave no obvious advantage in the attack on Pylos. The only answer is that they were intending to fight in the bay, and, for any such contest in ancient times, controlling the land around the arena of conflict was of great benefit. Once there, the occupants could either lend aid to their own side, so when their ships were driven ashore or beached and their men, gone overboard, appeared dripping on the shore they could be rescued. When enemy men and ships similarly arrived they could be captured. The possibility of the latter was why they had come in some force. This was not just a job for salvage crews or medics. Enemy vessels when they landed might be defended by well-equipped marines, sailors and hundreds of oarsmen. To combat these numbers, plenty of fully-armed warriors were needed. The Spartans already commanded the whole curve of the mainland shore except for Pylos fort itself, so, by taking over Sphacteria Island they dominated all the country around the naval amphitheatre where they intended to fight.

This can be the only real explanation of Spartan strategy; the

alternative one, that they were going to try and block up the passages at the north and south of the bay, to secure themselves there, and use the occupied island to close off the bay, just does not fit the scene. Firstly, if they wanted to do this, sending men to Sphacteria was pointless, as if they blocked the channels they would have no less controlled the bay whether they occupied the island or not. The Athenians could hardly drag their ships over the high rocky spine of Sphacteria and re-launch them in Pylos bay. But the clinching evidence undermining such a suggestion is that while the northern mouth of the bay is narrow, and could be blocked by a few warships, the southern end could not. The sea space there is about a mile across, and it just would not have been possible to bar it, except by drawing the whole fleet up in line to cover the distance. The problem with this scenario is first that the ships could not be kept on permanent station there, and, anyway, if the Athenian fleet came up then the Spartans would have to either withdraw into the bay or accept battle in a fairly open sea space. This made no sense, but what did was to wait for the Athenians to enter the bay and fight them there in a constricted area where Athenian superior seamanship would make less of a difference, and where the Spartans, in control of the shores all around, could hope to both win the encounter and ensure any of the enemies' disabled vessels were captured, while their own were given swift succour to save men and ships, to get them back into the fight.

Brasidas, laid up with his wound in the camp on the mainland, must have realised a great sea battle was about to develop. Probably, he would have had a view himself or news would have been brought of the Athenians advancing against his comrades. The Spartans had now mostly launched, pulled away from the beach and formed a line. But he saw no equivalent of himself leading by example on the prow of the foremost ship, and what occurred was something like a rout. The Athenian commanders' trumpeters and signallers gave the order to advance down the line, and their captains picked up their cue. They fanned out to fill the bay. Oar strokes quickened, glistening bronze beaks cleaving the water and pointing ominously towards the enemy facing them. The Spartan ships, with sea room at a minimum, might have hoped to turn the battle into something like a land fight, where their heavy-armed marine spearmen would have the advantage, but it did not turn out that way. The Athenian triremes had momentum, coming in hard with water creaming round the rams. Marines sounded the paean, with bowmen bracing themselves on the thwarts of their ships and letting fly. We do not even hear of the Spartan hoplites

carried on their decks making much a fight of it at all, only that their battle line was pierced, and that the Peloponnesians panicked and turned to what they hoped would be the safety of the shore. The Athenian captains and crews did not need their vaunted skills now. It was plain sailing as many of the enemy were struck as they tried to run. It was time to make hay against a foe showing themselves to be real lubbers, despite many of their vessels coming from places like Corinth, Cythera or Gytheium, where the locals suckled sea water from their mothers' teats. In their attempt to get away they exposed their vulnerable flanks and rear, and found themselves disabled. Five were captured straight away, one even before its crew could leap into the shallows to escape. It was chaotic, with rank and order gone, hulls colliding, oars entangled, the crash and splintering of wooden planks, and even when those who got free reached the shore their tormentors did not leave them be, but raced in to try and pull the enemy craft off the beach and capture them. With the crews of many of these beached Peloponnesian vessels disembarked and some not even manned for the fight from the start, they were swiftly lashed alongside their captors' hulls and towed back towards the Athenian lines.

Brasidas, most likely settled in the midst of the rest of the general staff, and held up by his body servants to get a view, at last saw the Spartans show some fight. Their hoplites deployed on the beach saw a chance and rushed into the foaming water, trying to get at the Athenian ships in the shallows. And if they could not reach these, they attempted a tug of war to get back their own vessels that were being dragged off but were still close, bobbing in the waves by the shore. Now it did turn into a proper battle. Perhaps this was what the Spartans had in mind from the beginning, but if it was then it was high risk involving accepting great losses in their shipping to lure the enemy near the strand. Now, thousands were involved, with armoured Spartan hoplites slipping in the surf trying to stab at the Athenian marines, while the crews of the beached Peloponnesian ships fought against opponents on their own decks. Athenian warriors, their cries of war echoing through the summer air, were disembarking from their grounded triremes to get at the enemy, who now, on the shore, were a belligerent mixture of Spartiates, Perioci heavies and allied hoplites too. All were backed up by the ships' crews fighting as best they could with whatever weapons they found at hand.

In this maelstrom, the graduates of the *agoge* did not have such a great advantage. They did not practice any kind of individual duelling

with their weapons. Their *raison d'être* was to stand solid and unmovable beside their comrades, making them unbreakable in the close encounter fighting of a phalanx battle. But now, engaging from the decks of unstable warships or mixed up in a brawl on the beach, it was different. We know that Athenians, and no doubt other Greeks, did learn individual weapon training, the teachers of these kinds of skills are not infrequently mentioned. Now this was a situation where it might pay off. To unbalance an opponent on a swaying deck or showing the cunning to get in behind one who was not protected by comrades all around would have been what counted in this bloody tussle on the sand. Still it was much more even now, and the defenders had regained their nerve and were pressing hard, led by the best soldiers in Greece. But the other side were also buoyed by their success so far, and determined to try and further exploit what they had already won.

This was gut-knotting stuff. Some of the fighters were not armoured. Oarsmen particularly would have had little but a knife to fight with, and were wounded as they clawed at the shields of the hoplite infantry who had all the advantages in this kind of combat. The surf turned red with blood as the corpses of the dead bobbed in the water washed back and forth between the sides of the triremes. Decks were slippery with gore as men hacked at each other with swords. How long the contest lasted is unknowable, but eventually both sides had to pull back to gain breath. In this hiatus, it became clear that the Peloponnesians had managed to save all their ships except for those lost in the initial rout. But to recapture these five, or indeed take any of the Athenian warships, was just not going to be possible, as the enemy faced them in a serried line of prows pointing directly towards them, just out in the water of the bay. As for the attackers, they were as exhausted as the men on the beach, and the enemy were receiving reinforcements from their camps on the shore all the time, so the likelihood of further Athenian success also seemed remote.

It was a mutual decision to terminate, as the Athenian oarsmen backed out of range, and their foe panting, exhausted, and almost used up, maintained a battle line at the shore's edge. The Athenians properly secured their prizes, and looked to the dead and wounded as the commanders took stock of what had been achieved on the bloody day. It was much. The Spartans asked for the traditional truce to allow their dead to be returned to them. The Athenians had done sufficient

to merit setting up a trophy. For the other side, as the swell dispersed some but not all of the detritus of battle, there was plenty to depress them as they came to care for their wounded, and sort out their dead. But very soon, if not immediately, it became apparent that what had been lost had been much more than a few triremes and their disconsolate crews.

On Sphacteria Island could be seen soldiers waiting on the fringe of the sea, watching the debris from their comrades' warships roiling in the waters of the bay. They had been sent to occupy the island, hoping for a Peloponnesian victory in the naval contest, but now the water around them was in enemy control, and it seemed likely that they would be cut off from the mainland with no chance of crossing over to join their friends. And this was the way it turned out, and, worse, it soon became clear that there would be no chance of sneaking back, as even while the Athenians celebrated, these attentive victors made it impossible. They were setting a close watch and sending warships to cruise regularly all along the shore. They were keeping the island garrison penned in and under observation.

The news of the defeat would have swiftly reached Sparta and, soon after, the realisation of the plight of the marooned men. The shadow cast by the threat to their soldiers ensured the administration reacted immediately in the hope of keeping them from being taken by an enemy completely in charge of the waters around them. The city leadership, *ephors* and senior men from the Gerousia trudged the long miles to Pylos to see for themselves what could be done to stave off the disaster of so many Spartiates becoming prisoners of war. Once at the bay they quickly realised that not only could their men not be extracted safely, but that they would very soon run short of food. This was a priority if they were to survive and be in condition to resist if the Athenians tried to overwhelm them. In the light of this, the only way out seemed to be negotiations. After all, it had not been so long since the enemy, up against the wall, wracked by plague and in difficult financial circumstances, had themselves been asking for peace. The Athenians' generals on the spot were approached, and they agreed to a truce to allow time for a formal deputation to be sent to Athens.

But the terms extracted were harsh. For these diplomatic proceedings to get underway and allow sufficient supplies to be sent across to Sphacteria they were required to give up all their warships into Athenian custody for the duration of the truce. This applied to

both those at Pylos and in all the rest of Laconia, a high charge for the two quarts of barley, a pint of wine and the piece of meat per man allowed onto the island. Why the Spartans did not respond to these proposals with the scorn they surely deserved, rather than agreeing to such a one-sided arrangement, is not at all clear, unless retaining their triremes where they were was untenable with the Athenians completely dominant in the bay. Certainly, ancient warships were more the crew than the structure and it is perhaps understandable that, rather than try a breakout that might end in bloody defeat, they decided to cut their losses. But this does not explain why they handed over the rest of their navy that were based elsewhere as well. Both sides equally agreed not to attack each other on land or sea, and the Athenians consented to provide transport to take the embassy to Athens and back again. Brasidas, very likely by this time back convalescing in Sparta, must have been among many astonished to find his government had come to an agreement that gave over all their military shipping as a bond to ensure provisions got to Sphacteria, while they went cap in hand to try for an agreement that might free the stranded Spartans. He and many others must have wondered why they had spilt their blood and seen their comrades die only to see their sacrifices seemingly sold down the river.

When the Peloponnesian envoys stood in front of the Athenian Assembly in summer 425 BC, they tried to sell restraint to their audience on the grounds that their current position of advantage had been a result of misfortune on their part, and did not indicate a fundamental change in the balance of power. Sparta might be temporarily embarrassed, but her strength was still potent, and for Athens to risk continuing to fight could easily rebound badly on her. They could be sure that fortune would never stay with them forever, and, if they were prepared to allow the Sphacteria men to come home, then an appreciative enemy would be prepared to make peace around the status quo. This could herald a return to a time when Sparta and Athens as friends stood together at the head of the Greek world. This would be a world where all peoples would laud Athens for ensuring that a bloody damaging war had come to an end. This was a viewpoint that certainly reflects the feeling of the reporter, whose view was that Athens fell badly away from a Periclean ideal in failing to pick up this offer of a just peace. Athens, instead, used a temporary advantage to try and reach too far, forcing on her people years more of war that ended leading to that awful act of hubris in the adventure of Syracuse. Thucydides thought that a respectable peace at this time

might have avoided the train of events that eventually brought the Attic city down in the dust, under the heels of the very people they could then have come to satisfactory terms with.

The response to envoys came from a man called Cleon who wanted to tighten the screw. He is about to emerge as the second key protagonist in this story. He pushed for either a victorious, advantageous peace or a continuation of the war. He wanted, first, that the men from Sphacteria be brought back in chains to Athens, and before they were let go that Sparta should reinstate Nisaea, Pegae, Troezon and Achaëa back to Athenian control. These places had been taken when she was weak. This was a revanchist position from the first Peloponnesian war that saw control of these towns as giving Athens a significant 'cordon sanitaire' to keep any threat at arm's length, if in the future another Peloponnesian League leadership should decide to attack her. The emissaries, hoping the Athenians' first position was just posturing, proposed that a small negotiating group get down to serious horse trading. But Cleon balked, urging that this was an attempt to hoodwink the people and that any discussion must take place in open Assembly debate. It was good barrack-room lawyer stuff, and it worked with the citizens demanding they should witness everything to ensure against chicanery. Perhaps as Cleon intended from the first, the Spartans could not wear this. They knew if they began to talk nuts and bolts then word would get back to their allies who could not be happy with the idea of concessions. It did not take long to become clear to the Spartan envoys that the atmosphere in the city was such that any terms they might be offered would be the very opposite of moderate.

It was the end of 'jaw jaw', and the emissaries left the city; with the conference aborted, the truce folded, and, once more, it was 'war war'. But the Spartans found that not only had they got nothing from the peace talks but that the Athenians were going to slide out of what they had agreed when the truce was concluded. The Attic authorities now showed they were prepared to risk the wrath of the gods to entrench their advantage against enemies on the ropes. Years of war, annual devastation, plague and earthquakes had made them far less fastidious, and it may even be possible to imagine a smirk on the faces of some of the Athenian representatives when they declared they would not consider returning the Spartans their ships. They justified this blatant double dealing by detailing all sorts of bad practice, including an unprovoked attack on the fort at Pylos. The frustration

and anger of the Spartans can well be appreciated, as they denied all the allegations against them, and indeed it is difficult to imagine any aggressive acts against the Athenians being much more than tension-driven fracas between individuals or small groups on the ground. Details of any real organized assault in numbers would surely have come down to us. Finally, the Spartans understood how they had been hoodwinked, and the only remedy was to throw themselves back into a conflict that, at least, was now in the open again. They thought that they should try by their own efforts, rather than by any illusory good will of the enemy, to extract their comrades from the island of Sphacteria. But it was not easy. The enemy had beefed up the navy on the spot with twenty more ships from home. So now, well over seventy of them were available to patrol the island shores, anchoring all round it, when winds on the seaward side allowed. They did not even need to be careful, knowing they did not have to worry about being attacked, as the enemy no longer possessed any warships with which to take them on.

Beyond the bay, the fort on Coryphasium headland, where Demosthenes and his considerable army were visible, now gave an extra edge to the perennial Spartan fear of a helot rebellion. They knew there were locals who had been instrumental in encouraging their enemies in this incursion into southwestern Messene, but what they did not know was how widespread would be the response of the country people. Would the serfs of Messene de-camp wholesale in a kind of replay of the Mount Ithome nightmare performed on the shores of 'sandy Pylos' or would it be just dribs and drabs, difficult for particular masters, but not a threat to the state or the Spartan way of life. With the former even as a possibility, it is hardly surprising that, once the peace was off, the Spartans did what they could to dig out these interlopers. They kept the main army encamped opposite Sphacteria island along the bay, and organized repeated attacks on enemy holding the headland fort. But they had failed to get in when they were able to attack from both the sea and the land, so now it was going to be an even harder task. The enemy fleet completely ruled the waves, and the only avenue of assault was by land, along the sand spit leading to a well defended cliff. The Athenians posted in defence knew what their one weak spot was, and were not about to be caught napping. It was no longer just Demosthenes and his few, there were plenty of soldiers from the fleet to man the fort, and any assault was going to be very difficult indeed. So it is little surprising that the attacks by Thrasymelidas and the Peloponnesians, though they



continued determined and ferocious, also continued abortive. A war that had ranged from Thrace to Sicily, from Corcyra to Euboea had seemed to have come down to a standoff in a sand-blown backwater on the west coast of the Peloponnese. But it was a war where it would soon be not at all clear who was winning.



1. Horsemen on Parthenon frieze, Acropolis Museum, Athens.  
(*Author's photograph*)



2. Zea harbour at the Piraeus. (*Author's photograph*)



3. Walls of Potidaea. (*Author's photograph*)



4. Island off Corfu town where oligarchs and families were imprisoned. (*Author's photograph*)



5. Chalcidian helmet, a type becoming popular in the late fifth century, Ashmolean Museum. (*Author's photograph*)



6. Thracian *peltast*, Ashmolean Museum. (*Author's photograph*)



7. Silver Athenian *tetradrachm* fifth century, Ashmolean Museum.  
(*Author's photograph*)



8. Hoplite, heroically nude and carrying basic heavy infantry equipment of; spear, *hoplon* shield, Pilos helmet and sword, Istanbul Museum. (*Author's photograph*)





9. Full-scale reconstruction of trireme docked at Phalerum bay, Greece. (*Author's photograph*)



10. The Pnyx at Athens. (*Author's photograph*)





11. The old temple of Athena on the Acropolis destroyed by the Persians, that was used as a public treasury. (*Author's photograph*)



12. The modern bridge over the Strymon, where Brasidas' men rushed the defenders out of the snow before the surrender of Amphipolis.  
(*Author's photograph*)



13. The islands of Sybota, where battles were fought in both 433 and 427 BC. (*Author's photograph*)



14. Sphacteria Island seen across Pylos Bay, where the Spartans were trapped and captured by Demosthenes and Cleon. (*Author's photograph*)



15. Serpents' column built to commemorate the victory at Plataea 479 BC, now in Istanbul. (*Author's photograph*)



16. Byzantine castle on Lecythus Island off Torone, where the Athenian garrison made their last stand against Brasidas' army.  
*(Author's photograph)*



17. Beach outside Mende where in 423 BC Nicias and Nicostratus landed prior to attacking the defended hill ahead of them. *(Author's photograph)*



18. Hoplite takes leave on going to war, showing the decrease in body armour that was typical of this period, Archaeological Museum, Athens. (*Author's photograph*)





19. Looking down to Eion on the coast from the Acropolis of Amphipolis. (*Author's photograph*)



20. Remains of the Thracian gate at Amphipolis. (*Author's photograph*)



21. Looking towards the road outside Amphipolis where the Athenian centre was marching when attacked by Brasidas and his 150 men.  
(*Author's photograph*)



22. View from the Acropolis of Amphipolis looking towards the hills where Cleon and his army were deployed before the battle. (*Author's photograph*)

## *Chapter Six*

### **Cleon and Victory**

It is now that a second protagonist steps up to stand out as a real personality; and this despite the fact that we do not have even an approximate biography of Cleon. We know nothing at all of his childhood or youth, only that his father, Cleaenetus, was a plutocrat who had made his fortune in leather, probably as a tanner. The family money came from trade, something that had really blossomed in the imperial years but socially differentiated them from the old ruling families, whose assets were almost all in land. Cleon whilst growing up was ambitious, and a very effective speaker, but always retained the odour of the tannery that isolated him from the young nobles whose effortless superiority was fuelled by the knowledge that the sun, coming up every morning from behind the Hymettus range, would be shining on their wide estates. The money that Cleon inherited allowed him to fund those community musts for any aspiring political leader, such as entering the artistic competitions at the major festivals, and joining the political clubs where connections were made to push along the career of any would-be Assembly manipulator. He knew how to make important friends, how to get people into his political debt, and how to spin his own reputation in the most favourable way. Evidence makes it clear that, by the years around 430 BC, he had become a significant member of a contesting Athenian political elite. Indeed, he was a leading light in a group whose manoeuvring did some considerable damage to the dominant position of the great Pericles:

‘And yet many of his friends beset him with entreaties, and many of his enemies with threats and denunciations, and choruses sang songs of scurrilous mockery, railing at his generalship for its cowardice, and its abandonment of everything to the enemy. Cleon, too, was already harassing him, taking advantage of the wrath with which the citizens regarded him to make his own way toward the leadership of the people.’<sup>1</sup>

The effects of war, the stress of two years of invasion, and the sound of women wailing for those who had died outside Potidaea, had made the position of great pilot of the state vulnerable. The plague also cut a swath through both Pericles’ family and his political support. He immediately lost a sister and a son, and, by the end, his last legitimate



offspring, Paralus, was taken. There was continued frustration in the north, and more immediately a personal failure at Epidaurus when Pericles had commanded in that year's offensive effort. Also the disinclination to undertake a major attack against the Peloponnesians eventually encouraged sufficient dissatisfaction for political rivals to temporarily topple him from power. The leader who had entrenched the Athenian empire and beautified the Acropolis was stripped of his offices and fined heavily, between fifteen and fifty talents being recorded. And though he was back in office by 429 BC, the fact of his temporary eclipse says much for the growing clout of Cleon who in at least one report was present as chief prosecutor when Pericles was hauled before the court.<sup>2</sup>

Cleon is frequently derided as a demagogue who pandered to the lower orders, as a palpable downgrade from the likes of Pericles, but while this says as much about our sources as it does about him, still there is evidence that he was prepared to woo the poorer citizens so recently become a power in the city. Cleon made himself accessible and useful, so different from many of the old guard who made no attempt to hide their contempt for the lower orders. He is recorded as proposing an increase in the standard pay for jurymen, raising it to three *obols* (worth about half a drachma). The poorer citizens depended on this to be able to spare the time from their employment to hear cases, so this was a vital matter, as these juries both vetted magistrates and generals, when they were being chosen and audited re their conduct at the end of their tenure. He also made promises to a hungry people about feeding them, and for this reason he listened hard to the western lobby men with their promises of Sicilian corn. But this populist stance deeply worried the conservatives, whose tame playwrights bullyragged Cleon about failing on his promises to provide these abundant provisions. But he was very far from being alone in pandering to the electorate. The need for bread was always at the back of much Athenian thinking. Whether it be eying up expansion in Thessaly, Sicily or even Boeotia, it was always about the wheat fields that might provide for the burgeoning city. Control in these regions was always seen to be the imperative. Trade agreements never seemed quite tight enough to leaders who knew their careers could go down the tubes in double quick time if the food ran low. But to control these places was difficult, demanding the kind of resources the city finally did not have.

Like many an ambitious politician, Cleon strove to make a

reputation at court, where he could gain support from those he represented by undertaking popular briefs. He could also hone his oratorical expertise, so important in the Assembly. He is particularly remembered for prosecuting a general called Laches, when his unproductive leadership of the Sicilian expedition in 426 BC caused resentment back home. Not that ending up in court was unusual for Athenian commanders. Some of the city's greatest heroes had been arraigned in their time, going back to Miltiades before, and even after, he won everlasting fame and honour at Marathon. But if Cleon is heard of as a hard man to best at court, and a hawkish rival of Pericles, then it is over the matter of the disposition of the people of Mytilene in summer 427 BC that we can first hear a distinctive voice. This place had revolted from Athenian tutelage as the precursor of an effort to become the main player on the island of Lesbos, the kind of local aspiration the Athenians tried hard to discourage. Their scheme had long been in preparation, contemplating a move before the Peloponnesian war had even begun, but the coup now perpetrated had been encouraged by the new conditions of that conflict. Spartan help was now to be hoped for, although the other side of the coin was that any Athenian response to this kind of backsliding was going to be heightened.

The revolt had eventually been suppressed after a considerable campaign, with a key component being that the poorer classes, armed to defend the city, had turned on the rebel oligarch leadership and its Spartan friends to let the besieging Athenian army in. After the insurgency had been overcome, representatives of the defeated people had been allowed to go to Athens to plead for their city and their lives. The Athenians thought of themselves as a great people, with a history of crusading against the barbarian dark, with a rectitude exemplified by Aristide, and if Marathon and Salamis gave this some credence, nothing could veil the fact that they were now an empire. They may not have gone in for satraps, king's eyes or busy bureaucrats, but like their Persian equivalent they could respond with extreme ferocity when tributaries got out of line. At the Assembly, in the hot high summer of 427 BC, we learn that this was exactly what Cleon was proposing as he led the call to kill all the rebels as an example. This awful sentence was immediately ratified, and orders were dispatched to carry out the massacre on the island. The sequel was famous. As the trireme set out to transmit the orders for this carnage, minds began to change very quickly. People meeting in the streets, political clubs, and even at those classy drinking parties, called

*symposia*, started to think the decision taken at the Assembly might have very bad long-term consequences for Athens if carried out. Soon, enough momentum had gathered that the city machinery had to respond, and another Assembly was called on the very next day to reconsider the matter.

Now we hear the authentic voice of Cleon, or at least the one that has been sent down the ages. He is reported making the classic argument of deterrence, that only by the sternest retribution, with no trace of mercy, could such seditious behaviour be stopped in the future. The man is following a brute force, might is right line that, though in his mouth is perceived as poison, can be partly discovered in Pericles' analysis of imperial policy as well. More than this, Cleon is described as playing to the gallery, and of deriding orators who tried by crafty argument to persuade the people to overturn what had already been decided upon. What had been determined might be a blood-spattered disposal but it was one that was a reflection of the people's natural good sense expressed in a body. This was very much a hit against those traditional moneyed folk who sent their children to be trained in oratory to advance their political careers. Like any politician, then and now, he never let the fact that he had himself received the same advantages affect his discourse. This is the first occasion that a real picture of Cleon begins to be filled in. He is envisioned as something of an anti-intellectual, and this by a correspondent who clearly regards the input of educated intelligence as a foundation of Athenian success. Thucydides saw the old families with money, able to school their children, as the wellspring and guarantors of the city's success, and that anybody who contested this was a treacherous factionalist and potential disaster for the polity.

The second debate on Mytilene was real enough, if the neat opposition of ideas is possibly invented. Diodotus we hear of as the mouthpiece of those opposed to Cleon, and what he said might be seen as exactly the kind of sophistry that man was warning against. Yet it also made plenty of sense. It stressed that in any empire, however brutal the potential retaliation, revolt was always a possibility, either by people made desperate by bad times or made ambitious by good. And knowing this, it was the best policy to try and keep the common people of their subject communities onside, as had indeed been eventually decisive at Mytilene. This was better than killing them, and alienating their like in other places. So these less affluent but very numerous subjects would remain as friends, always

there when local bigwigs tried to lead revolts, rather than being afraid they would be killed when Athens got back in control. Bloody reprisals would only ensure that, after a revolt in the future, the whole populace would fight to the end, knowing that defeat would be bound to end in death anyway. Both made a spirited case, but this second time Cleon was not the winner. Diodotus prevailed in the debate, and the Assembly rescinded the first decision. But it was not just a question of votes. The murderous first order was already on its way by official galley, and the sentence could be expected to be carried out on arrival. So a second vessel was rapidly launched, with a crew highly motivated by rewards promised by the Mytilenian delegation still in Athens. The prospect of clinking coins made champion athletes out of the crew who got to the city just before Paches, the commander there, had started to implement the earlier judgment that would have turned the place into a community of ashes, shades and ghosts.

But if this contention was the occasion for Cleon to step out of the shadows, it was the next year's elections that were key. There are indications he very likely secured them for his people with promises of grain and fish. This was a high risk strategy though. If the demos became fractious enough when the stomachs of the assemblymen rumbled, the careers of those who had made pledges to fill them might suffer with exile, if not something worse. It was anyway a troubled time, financially it was difficult, the plague was back, food and timber were in short supply. Slaves were escaping from their grim barracks at the silver mines when the Spartans invaded, and so production at Laurium had dropped. The need for natural resources had always made Cleon a logical fit for the western lobby who wanted to expand Athenian influence in Italy and Sicily, and he was certainly involved in backing the expeditions sent in 425 BC. Ambitions in this direction are more than hinted at when Hyperbolus, one of Cleon's supporters, is pictured calling for a 100-trireme-strong expedition against Carthage as well.<sup>3</sup> Although what is said about this other consummate Assembly manipulator should be taken with a pinch of salt as he is ubiquitously derided for being a real plebeian, making his living selling lamps and as a 'pestilent fellow'.

Cleon was one of many in favour of a more bellicose policy; of taking the war to the enemy's homeland. This had been clear with his part in the criticism of Pericles' more supine posture, and he had very possibly stood behind Demosthenes' plan to make a descent on the Peloponnese. He was part of a hard war party, committed to circling

the enemy with strongpoints intended to choke off supplies, and support helots and others inclined to turn against their Spartan rulers. Also, if sufficient a lever could be got in Messenia, then Athens might be able not only to deny the fruits of this bread basket to Sparta but could make use of it themselves to feed the mouths at Athens and the Piraeus. Pylos, Corcyra even the Sicilian and Italians allies were part of it. Boeotia and Megara would be worked on soon, and there is a suggestion that Cleon made overtures to Argos too; any enemy of Sparta was a friend of his.

If Cleon had been vociferous about Mytilene, then he was even more so when Spartan envoys addressed the Assembly to argue for a peace that would see the men trapped on Sphacteria island be let free. When the citizens came, standing in the shadow of the Acropolis high off yet seeming almost close enough to touch in the clear summer air, Cleon was determined to control events. He represented those Athenians who would have none of these Spartans who expected an arrangement with little pain for themselves. He demanded the men on the island be made captive and brought to Athens as guarantor so the enemy would agree to the return of key places that Athens had given up under pressure, when the Thirty Year Peace was agreed back in winter 446–445 BC. Now using the whip hand, he contended Athens must take the opportunity to get them back. The Spartan delegates, misjudging the mood, saw this as a starting ploy and asked to meet with delegates to thrash out the details of an agreement. But Cleon was not interested, and insults were hurled at the envoys. He exhibited the kind of rudeness that justified old school aristocrats' distaste, and his poor manners on the podium were abhorred by this crowd who hated and feared this man of a new age. Almost a century after, he was remembered by Aristotle as:

‘the man who, with his attacks, corrupted the Athenians more than anyone else. Although other speakers behaved decently, Cleon was the first to shout during a speech in the Assembly, use abusive language while addressing the people, and hitch up his skirts [to move about].’<sup>4</sup>

Cleon called for the negotiations to be above board and open in front of the whole people, claiming any who disagreed with this plan were intending dishonesty. This scuppered any chance there might have been of real negotiations, as word of concessions the Spartan envoys would necessarily have to offer were bound to get back to the allies and cause rifts. Corinthians, Boeotians, Tegeans, Mantineans and many others had spilt plenty of blood in making the advances that the

Athenians would want reversed. This had been Cleon's intention from the start, and his design could not have succeeded better as the envoys, feeling themselves unable to negotiate, descended the road down the Pnyx hill, and immediately left town, knowing the truce was over and the war once more underway.

The Athenians found themselves distracted in the summer by news from Sicily and Italy where her enemies were trying to wrest control of the straits of Messene from her allies. But, as the high season began to wane, little decisive had transpired, while Cleon was again strutting the podium at another Assembly called to make decisions on the Pylos war. In the interim, morale in the city had been dented by the failure to successfully conclude the investment of the men on Sphacteria. At the earlier convocation, people had clearly assumed the game was already up for the ensnared Spartans, so when, after so much time, things still looked in the balance, it hurt. They had been kept abreast of what was happening, that the men on the island were getting plenty to eat, smuggled in to them, while their own troops were finding it harder and harder going. There was also the unpleasant realisation that when winter came the position of the Athenian forces at Pylos could only get more challenging. If the men on the island could hold out till then, for the Athenians it could be disaster. They needed to be able to supply the large number of troops that they still had stationed at Pylos by sea. The supplies, reinforcements and indeed everything required mainly came round the coast of the Peloponnese from Athens. Friendly folk from Messene might bring some stuff, but not much, as the Spartans dominated most of the country around, and once bad weather brought an end to safe sea travel they would either have to be evacuated, or risk starvation. And if the besiegers could hold on, the weather would soon make keeping up a constant blockade round Sphacteria almost impossible, allowing opportunities for the men trapped there to slip away and escape.

These fears started being articulated on the Pnyx. A volatile *demos* demanded that a way be found to harvest the benefits that they had previously assumed would just fall into their laps. It looked like a strategy wobble might be underway, with undercurrents of dissatisfaction about the manner in which they had been persuaded to reject the recently-offered Spartan compromise. Cleon was on hand to defend the policy that had thrown the proffered peace back in Lacedaemon teeth, but he knew he needed to do more to keep the Assembly onside. The people needed encouragement to ensure

sufficient bellicose momentum remained, so first Cleon had his clique put it about that the news messengers were bringing from Pylos was far more negative than the actual truth. In response, those who brought the news called his bluff, suggesting Cleon and another trusted man be sent as commissioners to verify what was really happening. But this did not suit at all as Cleon knew what had been said would almost certainly turn out to be correct. So, switching tack, he now called on the people, rather than just sending a fact finding mission, that they should bite the bullet and outfit another army to finish of the job. The arguments he made not only encompassed strategy but execution too. Nicias had been one of the elected generals, and so would be responsible for such an expedition, but this man who was a rival of Cleon's clearly did not relish the enterprise, and said so. The response he got was intended to stir the pot further, but whether Cleon expected the final outcome is a moot point. He claimed Nicias could expect an easy triumph, and that only a coward would not leap at the chance to go and capture the Sphacteria Spartans. Finally, he offered that if Nicias did not want to take up the gage he would go himself.

The rejoinder was remarkable. Nicias decided to call his bluff. Taking him at his word, he agreed to step down and to allow Cleon to command any army sent. The feeling is that it was done in a huff. Perhaps he could not resist forcing his rivals back to the wall. But for Cleon a chasm had opened up; he had surely never really intended to stake his reputation on the lottery of battle, but now he had been cornered. His rival, determined to allow him no way out, formally stood down from command with the whole Assembly as witness. Nicias had sprung the trap and made it clear as far as he was concerned that if Cleon believed he could do better, let him try. Our imagination pictures his face drained of blood, and white as a sheet, when he realised what his own words had landed him in. The people, now convinced he was just the man for the job, clamoured for him to take up the challenge. Forced into a corner, it would have been impossible to wriggle out of without a complete loss of face and concomitant eclipse of his influence. So he carried the thing out with as much aplomb as he could muster, saying that he was so unafraid of the Spartans that he would not take citizen hoplites with him, but just some allies from Lemnos and Imbros who were in town, plus some *peltasts* just come from the coast of Thrace and also 400 archers. On top of this he gave a real hostage to fortune by promising to finish off the whole campaign in twenty days' time, and if he took longer he

could be considered a failure.

This swap, from Nicias to Cleon, of command must have been something of a constitutional stretch, but presumably the Assembly could override previously designated generals in emergency situations, though by sending a man with no military experience there almost seems an element of perversity. Much of this interchange may anyway have just been invented, it is very difficult to believe that Cleon was suckered into making extravagant predictions that he then by chance managed to carry out. It does not fit. Nor does the idea that he refused the best troops available out of bravado, which is equally improbable. Much more credible is that Cleon had been planning his move for some time, and that he had been in contact with Demosthenes during the siege. Supplies were brought on a regular basis to the Pylos, so communication would not have been at all difficult. That is even if Demosthenes had not himself been back to Athens in the couple of months the siege had been going on. A strong argument can be made that these two were linked well before and that it had been Cleon's clout at home that had given Demosthenes the authority to carry out his plan to descend on the coast at Pylos despite the fact he was not one of the elected generals in the expeditionary force. So, having consulted with this experienced man, he would have known the kind of troops he would need to use against Sphacteria so these were exactly the kind he asked for. The general, we know, had seen what this type of soldier could do when handled well in the right terrain during testing times in Acarnania, Aetolia and Ambracia. He no doubt had explained what he had in mind against the trapped Spartans and that un-armoured missile troops, *peltasts* and bowmen were what would be required, rather than heavy citizen hoplites. For Cleon, this was information that would have been welcome. By taking foreign allies and mercenaries he was making far less demand in blood or time on those upon whose votes he depended. It would be a burden on the public purse, but many were under contract anyway, and clearly on hand, to go with this mint-new military man claiming he could clean up the Pylos business in only twenty days. It is almost certain this had not been just chance. There had been a plan here, and what we get told is just trope or fable. But however the debate actually unrolled, the upshot was the Assembly handed Cleon his first military command, and one that was destined to greatly boost his standing in the city.

That we have not heard before of Cleon handling the baton of



command in war suggests he was something new in the direction Athenian politics was travelling. He personifies an increase in specialism in civic leadership. Previously the likes of Themistocles, Cimon and Pericles were titans in the Assembly, the courts, the council and the war office too. They would stand on the Pnyx as frequently as they stood at the front of the phalanx. This would change in the coming century where the general and politician would tend to take on more discrete roles. The tanner's son was a pioneer here, largely making his mark in the hurly burly of city politics and eschewing the army life, though as his later years at Pylos and Amphipolis show this is a partial picture. The Athenians were always paradoxical, so it is hardly a surprise the rift between those who concentrated on kissing babies and those happier giving manly diatribes to bored and inattentive troops was never unqualified.

However the talking on the Pnyx actually played out, it was a well-judged alliance that had been forged to solve the problem of Pylos, Demosthenes an experienced battlefield commander and Cleon the home-town fixer. In the period since the truce had fallen apart, the Spartans on Sphacteria island had not been doing too badly in terms of subsistence. Though the Athenian ships had tried to impose a blockade, supplies had been got through to the marooned soldiers by helots, offered freedom and financial rewards for their efforts. Some had found boats, filled them with provisions and driven them at night onto the beaches on the seaward side of the island, while others had set out swimming from the mainland, and diving below the water swam 'dragging by a cord' packages of high protein stuff, poppy seeds mixed with honey and bruised linseed. All this would beef up the stockpiles that were becoming sufficient to threaten to keep the defenders going on into the winter.

Those who had been keeping tabs on the island were sick of the duty anyway; there were 14,000 men at Pylos, with only one spring to supply water; all were getting weary of keeping up the siege. They had expected the Spartans, cut off from succour, would soon be out for the count. But it had not proved so. The Athenians were stuck on the edge of enemy territory, pretty uncomfortably placed, knowing that envoys had passed from Sparta to Athens and back again with no apparent progress made. Many must have been becoming very frustrated with this interminable standoff; so they were delighted to find a new leadership had rolled into camp, a leadership that seemed determined to make an end of the matter. Though they must have

known if it came to fighting, rather than starvation, it might not be easy. After all there were proper Spartans on the island, and they were not going to be overcome effortlessly. They did not doubt the quality of the enemy they were going after, as was made clear on another occasion when the Spartans offered a prisoner swap:

‘Whereupon the ambassadors spoke out frankly in Athens, that by their unwillingness to effect an exchange of prisoners the Athenians acknowledged that Lacedaemonians were better men than they.’<sup>5</sup>

Nobody had beaten a Spartan force in a stand-up fight for a very long time. Yet they could take some comfort from the fact that, after over two months, the isolated garrison must be to some degree broken down and desperate. And the end was worth it. To capture these men would be an unprecedented coup.

Also in the period since the truce had ended something had occurred that meant the task the Athenians had in front of them had become a lot clearer and concomitantly less daunting. Previously dense impenetrable foliage, a tangle of bushes and trees had meant the Athenians looking across the water to the island could not make out exactly the numbers or the positions of the garrison. This had worried Demosthenes as he plotted and planned to bag the Spartans there. Not knowing the strength and placements of the defenders would be highly dangerous. His experience in the wooded and broken country of Aetolia had shown him this. Any intruders would be almost bound to be ambushed and in no position to respond to an enemy they could hardly see and one with the reputation as the most formidable close fighters of the day. But then all had changed when a landing party from an Athenian vessel that disembarked on the island, mainly to find a place to cook their meal, had an impact that for them was both unexpected and beneficial. They settled down, and were careful enough to put out pickets to ensure they were not surprised but that was as far as their prudence went. The fires they lit were allowed to get out of control, and a wind blowing up caused the undergrowth around their camp to ignite. While the picnickers hot footed it back to their ship, the flames took a good hold. So, completely unintentionally, a conflagration was started. Driven by extraordinary winds, it burned up almost all the foliage that had previously covered the island. The Spartans managed to save both themselves and their supplies, but when the sun rose on the devastation it showed them exposed and open to the eyes of the men posted on Pylos and on the ships patrolling the island shore.

Cleon had sailed and made the journey by now with his stitched-together party, and successfully combined with Demosthenes and the Athenian army on the headland of Coryphasium. The Athenians, with their reinforcement of missile men and a new tyro commander eager to make a name and seeing exactly what they had in front of them, were able to scheme. Demosthenes had been back on the spot from Athens earlier than Cleon and would be the hands-on commander, even if the other made sure he was sufficiently involved to share any credit that might be going. The two on meeting had no time to lose and after an abortive attempt to offer the Spartans' surrender terms, set to work. The experienced general, now with a clear view, knew what he had on his hands and saw the numbers of soldiers on the island were more numerous than he had initially thought. But even so, he had worked out a strategy and after a day passed, that they hoped would allow the defenders to relapse into their old routine, the men designated were embarked and slipped over to the island during the night. The forces involved divided on the way, with the intention of landing on both sides of the objective.

Sphacteria island was between two and three miles long and a few hundred yards wide, with a low spine of hills reaching to 300 feet in the north and around 200 further south with a saddle between about ninety-feet high. What awaited the Athenians in this rough country was an enemy mainly stationed in the middle of the island but with outposts in the south and to the north facing Pylos, where a crude fort was available to protect the men. The assault troops would have talked about options and orders for the morrow as they prepared to board the transports and so were ready. The first blow they struck was hard and deadly. The men at the southern outpost had taken no notice as the ships transporting the attackers came nearby, just thinking them the usual blockading squadron. So in the dark of the night they disembarked 800 hoplites and reached the Spartan camp even before anybody was awake or able to get their armour on. It was a massacre. They found only thirty defenders when they got to grips, with screams and confusion in the darkness. The attackers received little damage from men who could not even make out for certain targets to hit back at. As dawn broke, with the south end of the island secure the rest of the Athenians disembarked on the undefended strand. Seventy ships had crossed over, and all the oarsmen, except those on the lowest bank, landed to carry on the fight on terra firma. With them were the 800 archers, 400 of them just arrived added to 400 others already there, and the 800 *peltasts* that had been specially brought when Cleon

joined the cause. With these were solid Messenian hoplites and other heavy infantry who had long been on duty at Pylos fort. Altogether they must have numbered not far short of 9,000 men, most of them sailors, massively outnumbering the few hundred defenders.

Knowing both the qualities and the drawbacks of his light-armed men, Demosthenes decided upon a strategy that employed these to the maximum. He divided them up into groups of about 200, so they might be tight and manoeuvrable, and ordered each party to get as quickly as possible onto the highest ground. He instructed them to get around and about the enemy on all sides, without actually coming to grips where the heavy-armed Spartans and their comrades would have the advantage. It was to be classic hit and run tactics, with slingers, bowmen and *peltasts* harrying the enemy from a distance and taking to their heels if they tried to close. This tactic would have been virtually impossible before, when the vegetation would have allowed the Spartans to get close enough to strike before they were seen. But now in rocky open spaces the missile men could keep their distance, near enough to get hits but far off enough to get away when attacked.

Epitadas, the Spartan general, had realised, as soon as the sun came up, that his people on the south end of the island were in trouble, and reacted. But even before his men could arm themselves and get in order, the Athenians were already moving against them. The Spartans pressed forward down the spine of the island, but they found it difficult to get at the enemy, despite now seeing that they had overrun their comrades at the southern outpost. It was difficult terrain to cover quickly while retaining any kind of formation and the enemy hoplites were now disembarked and formed up to support the lighter men. Their threat meant the Spartans could not break ranks to chase down the enemy light infantry, because if they did the heavy infantry would come formed and terrible to crush them. So they were pinned, if they tried to attack phalanx to phalanx the enemy lights would come down and throw in at their vulnerable side and rear. But if they tried to get at these gadflies they would have to open their ranks and find themselves exposed to the armoured enemy spearmen. The key had been combined arms. If the missile men had not had the protection of the heavies, the Spartans could have caught and trapped them, down by the water's edge on the narrow island.

As time passed it became very difficult for the defenders, despite getting occasional kills in against the less nimble or more unlucky men harassing them. It was a stalemate, but one where they suffered

wounds from javelins, arrows and slingshot. Casualties were not immediately great. They were well armoured. Even so, some shots found their mark and the Spartans who rushed out to chase their tormentors became tired. Weary and sluggish, their confidence waned, they began to realise how numerous the enemy were, and how they had lost their trepidation about facing famous Spartan spears. The Athenians, buoyed by success, approached in larger groups, and sent salvos of anything they could get a hold of at their shrinking foe. This with the noise of the attackers shouting meant the Spartans could hardly hear their officers orders and with ash from burned foliage getting in their lungs and eyes many were getting close to despair. Soon, they could barely see, only knowing clouds of dangerous projectiles were arriving in their ranks out of the swirling, smoking atmosphere surrounding them.

Outnumbered, with the enemy creating a cacophony of yelling, the Spartans were beginning to fail, the dust of burned wood mingling with sweat falling from their brows blinding them. Spartan morale and discipline and the high ratio of officers to men meant beating them was never going to be easy, but the situation had become so stressful that even they could not stand, 'confounded' in this kind of unfamiliar fighting. An interesting feature is that the Spartans found they were suffering particularly from head wounds. It is possible they were only wearing felt caps, or at most helmets that did not cover all the face. Though we know apart from this they were in their usual heavy battle gear, because it is mentioned as the cause of them being too slow to catch the attackers. Epitadas now had no option but to yell to his men to fall back and make a stand at the fort at the north end of the island. There, at least they would have more support from the garrison left behind, and protection from the walls that surrounded the place. That this decision was taken to abandon the camp with the only natural water source on the island shows how critical things had become. But they all knew he was right, and forming in closed ranks they followed, struggling, out of breath and disorganized; they lost not a few men cut down in the retreat. Once they got back to the stronghold, they found themselves better placed. It was higher ground, and, with their flanks more secure, it was going to be far more problematic to surround them.

The Spartans had stumbled back helped by their helot servants, up over the rough ground with arrows, slingshot and javelins whistling after as the enemy skirmishers kept tight on their tail, and the

Athenian and Messenian hoplites came on as quickly as they could. They might have lost sight of the quarry for a time in the burned dust atmosphere but not for long. It was over a mile back to the fort, a long slog for men already tired and depressed by how the fight had gone since the invaders first arrived on their shore. Now, though having reached their refuge, hope revived, from then on it should be head to head, shield-to-shield combat. This was just the ticket for the Spartans despite the attackers coming on boldly, and much more numerous. The hoplites who pushed forward against them found no way in. Defeatism in the ranks evaporated now, as these men settled down to just what they had been bred for.

Demosthenes and Cleon were there up with the men, encouraging them to achieve what would be an incredible feat of defeating the masters of war on their own terms. But it was not happening, it soon became abundantly clear that the frontal attacks they had been orchestrating would not get the job done and in the torrid sunshine after a long-day's fighting those trying to storm the fort were becoming tormented by thirst. Now there came a key contribution. It was from people who had plenty of reason to want to humiliate the defenders of Sphacteria. A Messenian officer named Conon stepped forward. This man asked to speak to the commanding generals, and Cleon and Demosthenes listened eagerly as he outlined his plan. The blockade had been going on seventy-two days already, and if Cleon had only been there under three weeks then he was running out of time to keep his promise to take the place in twenty days. Conon offered to lead a party of archers and other light troops to get round behind the fort, to a position where they could dominate the enemy and hurl down missiles on the obdurate occupants. The Messenian had noticed a path running along the steep east-facing side of the island that would be out of site of the defenders and a plan was agreed that he lead out a taskforce down below the cliff edge. There, his men kept down, crawling on all fours, as fast as they could, around the seaward side of the fort. This was rough country and, as the Messenian officer had noticed before he proposed the strategy, the defenders had not taken the precaution of keeping a guard there. Creeping on their bellies, they were able to make reasonable progress until reaching the higher ground behind the defenders' position.

Once there, they stood up in this commanding place, and began to send their projectiles into the heart of the Spartan fort spread out below them. The defenders were in despair when they heard the cry of

joy from these enemies, and saw the new men entering the contest from their rear. This was beginning to look decisive and there is even a comparison made to the epic sacrifice at Thermopylae. On that field of battle, Leonidas and the 300 had been placed 'between two fires', cut off and assailed on all sides, and in their conduct showed the ideal of Laconic fortitude. But this time there was no insouciant acceptance of a group happy to go down in desperate forfeit. Old certainties dissolved as they found themselves facing shameful defeat by men they would have for generations expected to best in any battle. All the while the commandos had been creeping round the back of the fort, Demosthenes and Cleon had been driving forward the attacks at the front. But where previously these had been repulsed, now the Spartans began seriously to waver. Their command structure had been badly disrupted; not only had Epitadas been killed in the fighting but the next-in-command Hippagretas had fallen wounded too, their bloodied bodies lying in the front line of battle.

So, almost leaderless, surrounded and feeling the effects of having nothing to eat in a long day's fighting, the defenders started to fall back, showing signs of disintegrating. It was at this moment, where everything pointed to them being overrun, that the attackers held their hand. Cleon and Demosthenes wanted not just to defeat the Spartans but to take them prisoner, so rather than allowing their troops, blood up, to cut down the men they found at their mercy, they called a halt. Before it came to a massacre, they decided to try and persuade the enemy to see reason, to surrender and save their lives. The Athenians shouted to the defenders to accept a truce, and they indicated their acceptance by lowering their shields and waving their hands in the air. Between the lines the commanders met. Cleon and Demosthenes were on one side, and on the other was Styphon for the Spartans, who had taken over when Epitadas died, and Hippagretas got cut down. This somewhat junior officer did not relish his just-donn'd responsibility, and asked to be allowed to consult his superiors in the camp on the mainland. The Athenians, although determined to keep the survivors constrained on the island, allowed representatives from the main Spartan army to come over to take back the question of what they should do to the generals in command. It was not an easy decision and heralds passed between the island and the mainland a number of times before they could make up their minds. As it turned out these more senior men did not want to share the opprobrium for what was about to happen on Sphacteria either, and their representative came back with the advice 'the Spartans bid you to

decide for yourselves so long as you do nothing dishonourable.’ This was a fudge, very different from the old school stuff that might have been expected to ‘die where you stand’ or ‘never surrender’. This was a deviation from the expected hard line that is only explicable in the light of an increasing realisation that Spartan manpower was rapidly on the decline, and to accept such a proportionate loss for the city was just unthinkable.

Whatever the senior military men in the main camp expected, on the island the exhausted, disorientated and almost leaderless survivors consulted amongst themselves for no great length of time before deciding to lay down their arms and capitulate. Kept under strict guard for the night, with victors and vanquished sleeping on the battlefield together, in the morning a trophy was erected, and the herald who had arrived from the mainland was informed that the Spartans could come and collect the 128 dead who had fallen in the struggles of the day before. Most had succumbed to missile fire, as the combat had seldom come to hand to hand, a fact revealed by the Athenians having lost very few men. So after seventy-two days of their being penned in on Sphacteria the extraordinary had happened and 292 soldiers, 120 full Spartiates and 172 other Laconians, who had been since time immemorial expected to come home either carrying or on their shields, were sitting disconsolate as prisoners of war. Cleon had always dreamed of taking captives to parade back home and he was going to make the most of those he now had. Their prizes were divvied up to be more easily kept secure; each group held by a captain and crew of a trireme. The mariners would stay on high alert until they arrived safely back inside the port at Piraeus.

For Sparta, this was pain piled on pain. They had botched the earlier negotiations and ended up losing all their warships but this latest defeat in the field was a disaster of an unparalleled kind. And for the Athenians it was concomitant triumph, so, even if we don’t know, we can reasonably presume there was plenty of pageant as the prisoners were led up between the long walls flanking the road from the port to the city of Athens. Crowds must have gathered from the sailors’ bars in the Piraeus to the whorehouses and pottery shops of the Ceramicus and all points in between, people out in force as Cleon milked what had been an amazing success. There would have been funeral orations for the few Athenians who had died and speeches of triumph heard by a people who had gone from fearful condition, not knowing where the next blow would come from, to now wondering



what the extend of the benefits they might accrue from this human windfall. The occasion would not soon be forgotten either, as dedications of Spartan arms could be seen for years in the temples of the city to remind the people that on even the worst of days how high the city had stood at that time. A battered shield can even still be seen to this day in the Agora Museum. Ancient polities did not have extensive arrangements for captives, either criminal or wartime. The idea of long-time incarceration was foreign to them. It was 'off with their head' or exile that usually faced those who fell afoul of the authorities at this time. But prisons were found somewhere for these extraordinary captives; conditions were decent but with no possibility of escape. While fellow feelings as Hellenes and residual considerations for people who had stood at their side against the Persians might have ensured they were not abused, surely the prisoners would not have been kept in chains as is suggested<sup>6</sup> while they were being transported back to Athens. Still, nobody in the city was going to allow the slightest chink through which these valuable hostages might be spirited away.

For Cleon, it was as good as it got. He would soon get his reward, being given meals at state expense, front seats at the theatre and voted in as general in spring 424 BC. Nicias and Thucydides the historian were chosen too, in a mixed bag of electoral success that shows well the complexity of Athenian politics. Cleon might seem to be ruling the roost after his Pylos triumph but still candidates who were clearly not his friends also garnered plenty of votes. Cleon had long been associated with a group of commanders who led the way in a forward strategy, and now they were not going to let slip the opportunity to build on success. The first sign of this aggressive intent was shown straight after the victory at Sphacteria when, although the main army may have gone home, Pylos was not abandoned. The fort was left with a garrison brought in:

'from the Messenians who had been settled in Naupactus, joined to them an adequate force from their other allies'.<sup>7</sup>

The harassment of the enemies' homeland continued, with Nicias gobbling up Cythera, an island to the south of Laconia and an important entrepot for the Peloponnesian trade with corn-rich Egypt. So grim was the situation that Spartan morale took a real hit, and if July 424 BC had its downside for the Athenians with a setback in Sicily, then they were already readying themselves in order to outfit a big push in Megara.

But the effect of what had been achieved was going to be more important than all this. The impact would be far greater than even the triumphant returnees could have predicted. It turned out the prisoners doubled as effective insurance against an enemy who had been mercilessly harrying Attica for years. By threatening the lives of these men if the Peloponnesians crossed the border, the hostages effectively kept the Spartans out of Attica for the rest of the Archidamian war. The farmers and their families who had been camping on waste ground or down between the long walls were now able to repopulate the countryside. This was a return to the old hallowed way of living, so beloved of traditionalists like Aristophanes the comic playwright, as against the city-slicker lifestyle. There was much work for these home comers to do, rebuilding houses, hedges and roads, replanting fields and orchards. And as they organized their slaves and hired workers many no doubt gave some thought to the fact that they owed the return to their old life pretty much entirely to the military success of Cleon. This was the kind of kudos that allowed him and other like-minded city leaders to carry out a reform that was going to be very important for Athens future ability to wage war. They took a stab at a thorough-going reassessment of the tribute paid by the cities of the Athenian League. This seemed at the centre a very necessary reform, considering how much the war had been costing on the outlay of great fleets and the armies required to suppress rebellion in places like Mytilene and Potidaea and to stop the spark of revolt flaring up elsewhere. But if it was a nice result for the head of the League then it was one not so great for many of the members when they heard that their contribution rates were to be doubled if not trebled in the future.

Cleon's triumph looked like it had saved his city from what had been a losing war. Athens had certainly not been a happy place in the period he was establishing himself in the Assembly. There had not been a worse time for generations, two bouts of plague had decimated the population and the survivors' diet was bad with so many people crowded inside the walls. Even if the supply lines were kept open, ancient-world transport, particularly in wartime, just could not cope with much more than providing a survival diet. And though Athens did have ships interdicting the grain lanes of her enemies, the cargoes of transport ships taken on the way to Corinth or the ports of the Peloponnese did little to supplement the citizens' diet. And the sailors required aboard the city triremes often had to stay at this duty for months, if not years, at a time and so were not available to man supply ships. Foreign bottoms from friendly states ensured there was

some grain, salt fish, timber and other necessities unloaded on the quays at Piraeus, but seldom enough to ensure that bellies were satisfyingly full.

But now Athens' leaders had allowed a real change of tone, although, for many, the taste of Cleon's success was still bitter in the mouth. For Aristophanes that this man had gained the credit was intolerable and in 'The Knights' he pushes the idea that it had been Demosthenes who had really made the difference:

'This man of leather knows his old master thoroughly; he plays the fawning cur, flatters, cajoles, wheedles, and dupes him at will with little scraps of leavings, which he allows him to get ... Dear Demos, he will say, try a single case and you will have done enough; then take your bath, eat, swallow and devour; here are three *obols*. Then the Paphlagonian filches from one of us what we have prepared and makes a present of it to our old man. The other day I had just kneaded a Spartan cake at Pylos, the cunning rogue came behind my back, sneaked it and offered the cake, which was my invention, in his own name'.<sup>8</sup> ([50] and [55])

Cleon was derided for claiming credit for what was achieved in Pylos by Demosthenes. There is a history in all this as Cleon had prosecuted the playwright for an earlier production 'The Babylonians' claiming it slandered the Athenian people. In truth, little is left except the facts that give Cleon much credit; Thucydides also allowed little applause for his leadership, instead claiming the whole thing as a stroke of luck, owing virtually nothing to the efforts of the politician or the general.

But whoever got the credit at the time or who gains the grave acclaim of history, what is clear is how the new situation allowed the Athenians to approach putative peace talks with much greater confidence. No longer were the people hoping that the generosity of their enemies might allow a return to something not too much worse than the status quo. Now they intended to bargain for a position of real security. To get an advantage that would ensure the Spartans and their Peloponnesian friends could not come back and attack them again in dangerous strength in the near future. Yet there were also consequences that would not turn out so positive. Even at the time some had the feeling that this triumph for Athens might in the long run not be a good thing, that the confidence it gave the people might lead eventually to an overstretch that could end in disaster. That a tendency to hubris of democracy on a mission could end up very badly. Recent achievements might have mollified an ever-fractious

people at home but problems in the Athenian empire had not all been solved and, equally inevitably, the new developments had forced a rethink in the austere halls of Sparta. The leadership there were shaken out of their usual lethargy by the Pylos disaster, making them consider a pushing and aggressive policy that would allow Brasidas to come to the fore. Also, by the end of 424 BC it would not be just the achievements of that man at Megara, and in the north, that partly pushed the balance back their way. The Peloponnesians' league had also made strides in the west, taking Oeniadae, a place from where they might control the Gulf of Corinth route, and there would also be a disaster on the borders of Boeotia the like of which the Athenian army had not suffered in a long time.

## Chapter Seven

### A Distraction Then a Start

In the murky eons predating the Athenian legendary hero Theseus, long before the memory of the people, and when kings were close kin of the gods, a new monarch, called Pandion, had ascended the throne at Athens. He was, apparently, the second of his name. But, if royals were dusted with something of the deity, it did not exempt them from the normal traumas of mankind. His misfortune was to have ambitious cousins who drove him into exile to put their father, Metion, on the throne while he ended up at Megara. A new marriage partner from the local royal house ensured not only that he mounted the throne of that place but that he had progeny to hold up their father's cause. And, led by Nisos, these young men kicked out the sons of Metion, and established a brother called Aegeus as king in Attica, while Nisos kept the crown of Megara, directly inherited from his father. Only then to find himself living in turbulent times when threatened by the celebrated Minos, son of Zeus and king of Crete, who, as part of a war against Athens, delayed to take a swipe at Megara. And the name of the town itself, at least according to the Boeotians, was taken from Megareus, a son of Poseidon, who died at the head of a Boeotian army helping King Nisos in this conflict. A continued connection between Athens and Megara is confirmed by Homer who lumps them together in the catalogue of the sleek black ships that crossed the Aegean to attack Troy.

But in less legendary times interaction remained. A notorious instance was when Cylon, an Athenian sporting superstar and Olympic Games winner at the 35th Olympiad in 640 BC, a celebrity sprinkled with glamour, married the daughter of Theagenes, the tyrant of Megara. With these connections, his ambition rose concomitantly. Social tensions at Athens were always present, and any lack of *eunomia* or good governance allowed those who wanted it to exploit them. After consulting the Delphic oracle, this chancer decided to try and take over his home town. He borrowed troops from his father in law, and occupied the Athenian Acropolis, deserted because the people were celebrating the festival of Zeus, 'the Gracious', outside the city. But appearances could be deceptive, and expectations of popular support turned out ill founded as the citizens swarmed back into town and besieged the intruder in a barricaded strongpoint near where the

Parthenon now stands. But early enthusiasm was not sustained by the attackers, and soon many drifted back to their usual business, leaving only a skeleton force under the nine archons, then still the key city executives, to keep the intruders confined. Starvation and thirst set in, and giving up the enterprise, Cylon slipped away with his brother, who was in on this family enterprise, out down the steep side of the rock and away. His supporters were not so lucky, for when deprivation forced their surrender the victors killed them to a man on the very site of the goddess Athena's temple. This was an action that not only cursed the spot but also the men, and their families, who carried out the massacre. These brutal victors were driven out of town, and even the bones of their ancestors were thrown beyond Athens' city limits. We know, though, that the noble family most involved, the Alcmaeonids, stole back in time, and remained unmolested and important down the generations.

Megara town stood east of the Isthmus of Corinth at the mouth of a bowl of highlands opposite Salamis Island. Walls can still be discovered, and although they are of a later vintage they were built on top of older predecessors, and in both the fountain house of Theagenes and the Karia acropolis significant ancient artefacts have turned up. This place did not have a high natural fortress like the Athenian acropolis but, still, it was steep enough to the upper town that a later Spartan king, Agesilaus, half crippled himself climbing it. There was fine farm country in a cone of land spreading to its widest where it reaches the Saronic gulf and situated between the rampart of the Pateras range that rises to over 3,000 feet to the east and the Gerania range, almost 1,000 feet higher, to the west. This supported about 40,000 people with a decent amount of good flat fertile country where the local aristocracy grazed their cattle and sheep, as well as other agriculturally productive acres. There was also salt on the coast but, this apart, like so many Greek communities the place was far from resource rich, and food often needed to be imported. This location, however, with access to two gulfs, had been one from which its people had profited for centuries, though the place also had a troubled history made inevitable by its position between Athens and Corinth. Control of the Megarid had always been considered a vital interest for the inhabitants of Attica, as, hard by mount Gerania, it could either block an easy road of invasion from the Peloponnese or alternatively provide an ideal base for invaders with an open avenue to pour into the Athenian heartland. The area could well have been under her control during the Bronze Age. But in the early classical period,

although seen as one of the four regions of Attica, the Megarid was usually more in the orbit of Corinth.

The place had been part of both the common Archaic Greek drive to colonise and the normal inclination to tyranny. There is a clue to the first in the name Megara Hyblaea planted on the east coast of Sicily, and they also showed real prescience regarding the future importance of the Bosphorus, settling in the mid seventh century both Byzantium and Chalcedon that between them padlocked that crucial waterway. The late 600s saw, as in so many other Greek communities, the rise of a strong man. There was nothing too subtle about Theagenes, who made himself tyrant by directly buying the support of the lower orders by divvying up the carcasses of the rich landowners' cattle between them.<sup>1</sup> This was a bit of pandering to the poor that was still not forgiven years later when Aristophanes in sympathy with well-heeled patrons holds him up as an example of 'swinishness'.<sup>2</sup> Like so many of his ilk, he probably started on his way to the top as a military commander, who, after some success, was able to persuade his compatriots to fund a personal bodyguard. This was a career trajectory typical of these tyrants, from Pisistratus at Athens to Cypselus at Corinth.

Little enough is actually known of him personally, only that this age of tyrants saw Megara and Athens squabbling over the possession of Salamis island, with the latter coming out on top in the 560s under the leadership of her own strongman Peisistratus. And about the same time, control of Perachora, the country right to the Isthmus, formally exercised by Megara, was lost to Corinth. This people played their part in the Persian epic when a detachment of Mardonius' army, that was withdrawing through their country, got lost and were cut to ribbons by the local levy, after firing off all their arrows to no purpose. In the years before the first Peloponnesian war, this truncated polity had been a member of the Delian League until, as a consequence of Athenian setbacks in that conflict, it had been extracted from her list of friends and allies and recruited to Sparta's Peloponnesian League. This was a process that also saw Nisaea, the port on the Saronic gulf that had been held by an Athenian garrison, being surrendered. Megara had equally been of real moment in the ignition of the second Peloponnesian war after the Athenians introduced a policy to bar Megaran merchants from their markets. The winter of 433/432 BC, or a bit before, saw the Athenian Assembly, in a stew of resentment at their neighbour, introduce this bit of communal chastisement designed

by Pericles. It was likely instigated after they had learned that Megaran ships had fought with Corinth against them at Sybota in 433 BC, and, if Corinth with her Spartan sponsor was too dangerous to attack directly then the same was not so true of this neighbour. The intention was to give the message that it was dangerous to help Corinth against Athens, when to have attacked the Isthmus city directly might have brought on war with Sparta. An excuse had been trumped up about farmers using land consecrated to Demeter, goddess of the harvest, and when a herald from the Attic capital was sent to complain about the sacrilege he was promptly murdered. The consequent rupture of relations saw the 'Megaran Decree' bar her merchants from trade with Athens and its allies in the Delian League. This was strong stuff. An embargo in peace time was hardly known in Greek interstate relations, and such a thing would deny them any chance to make money in those profitable commercial hunting grounds where they had previously sold their goods. It was a real blow, as Megara had two ports, Nisaeas and Pegae on the Gulf of Corinth through which were exported the wool and horses that were key to the city's prosperity. Although much of this commerce was carried out by *metics*, it still hit community income as these resident foreigners paid taxes like everybody else.

There is hot dispute on how significant this matter was in bringing the Peloponnesian war to a head. Thucydides' key contention is that it was fear of Athenian power that drove the Spartans to war and hardly mentions the Decree at all. Though what is not in doubt is that the revocation of the Megaran Decree was a central plank of the ultimatum Sparta dispatched to Athens in 432 BC, and even the great historian seems to accept that, if the Athenians had withdrawn the offending article, war might have been avoided. And if he saw a mere pretext, then others, like Diodorus of Sicily, with Ephorus of Cyme as informant, did not:

'ordering the Athenians to rescind the action against the Megarians, and threatening, if they did not accede, to wage war upon them together with the forces of their allies'.<sup>3</sup>

The Sicilian also quotes: 'Aristophanes, the poet of the Old Comedy, who lived in the period of Pericles, O ye farmers, wretched creatures, listen now and understand, if you fain would learn the reason why it was peace left the land. Pheidias began the mischief, having come to grief and shame, Pericles was next in order, fearing he might share the blame. By his Megara-enactment lighting first a little flame, such a



bitter smoke ascended while the flames of war he blew, that from every eye in Hellas everywhere the tears it drew.'

It certainly seems it was sufficiently central to Pericles' position that to accede to Sparta's demand would be tantamount to accepting slavery. If we can dispute the hyperbole, then the matter, without doubt, became a major signpost on the road to war.

The direction Athenian banners took from very early on in the conflict certainly seems to confirm that Megara was key, and the acquisitive eyes set from the beginning suggest the importance of her role in the conflagration. Like the Serbian dimension in the First World War, perhaps it was a fuse to light an already very combustible situation but that it was the Austrian invasion of Serbia that first saw swords crossed in that struggle must mean something. And soon after the Peloponnesian war began in 431 BC, the Athenians, showing one of their first signs of really aggressive intent, tried to regain the initiative in the Megarid; when not only the whole levy, 'resident aliens' as well, led by Pericles invaded in cooperation with a fleet of 100 ships coming back from a cruise in western waters; making the conglomerate invasion army a huge one of over 13,000 hoplites and a multitude of light infantry. However, apart from showing in what strength pre-plague Athens could mobilise they achieved nothing more than thoroughly wrecking their western neighbours cultivated acres before fading back home. Still it unequivocally showed an intent. The programme continued with the Athenians coming back two times every year in sufficient force to drive the inhabitants behind their walls and bring agricultural production to a halt. To increase her pain further, the presence of a fleet at Naupactus in the Corinthian gulf made it all but impossible to import corn from the west; a long-distance blockade that was seconded by the much more proximate squeeze put on by the permanent Athenian presence on Salamis.

Topography crafts events and the environs of Megara were no exception. It was about one and half miles from the sea to the town. Down that distance ran long walls joining it with the defences of Nisaea port on the Saronic gulf. Then running east a small spit of land jutted out while the main coast ran northeast up to Attica and Eleusis. This little peninsula was called Minoa, peopled by locals who told stories of the fleet of King Minos anchoring there on their way to attack Athens.<sup>4</sup> Almost an island, it was cut off at its west end by a marshy channel with just one bridge over it, carrying the road to Nisaea and Megara. Just off the end of the promontory was the coast

of Salamis Island, which itself divided at its western end with another headland called Budorum situated only a few hundred yards from Minoa. The nearness of Salamis meant that the small Athenian force kept on the island always acted as a threat to the roadstead leading to Nisae; a sword of Damocles that, if the Athenians decided to channel their military priorities in that direction, might fall at anytime. We have seen already in 429 BC that Brasidas was part of an attempt to lift this threat when he transferred naval manpower from the Gulf of Corinth to the Saronic front. But ill-prepared Megaran warships and vigilant lookouts on beacon duty scuppered the attempt and it is indeed probable a reason for the condition of the ships involved was that they could not be kept active and well honed because of the Athenians being in strength nearby. But it was not just that no impression had been made in this instance. Things got worse in summer 427 BC when the Megarans lost Minoa to the Athenians as well. Nicias it was who continued to make a name by doing something in this part of the world. One of the generals elected for the year, he decided that the defences built on the Isthmus of Minoa were vulnerable to attack. And by taking them the Athenians could not only render their grip even tighter but could also put out of business some privateers and Peloponnesian triremes that had been using the place as a base. There were two towers that had been built down by the coast and the experienced Athenian general had thought out a way to crack these fortifications. He placed some siege engines on his boats and attacked from the water, and this unexpected assault was perfectly successful. With these defences overrun and controlling the channel between Minoa and the mainland, Nicias built a wall to stop the enemy being able to reach the bridge and attack the men he intended to leave to occupy the island. It only took a few days to do all this, and throw up a fortified post for the garrison. But once done Nicias and his army could leave knowing the Athenian stranglehold on Megara had been considerably upgraded.

This people had been having it hard for years with the Athenians harrying them on a twice yearly basis as well as keeping tight on their neck from near Nisaea. That Megara was a community under stress was well understood at Athens, in 425 BC the town's problems with food supply was sufficiently common knowledge to get a mention on the Athenian stage.<sup>5</sup> The accumulated effect on a community that anyway suffered from chronic factional tension was shown in 427 BC, when a group of oligarchs were driven out of town. What actually occurred is not a little mystifying as previous political history had

shown governments of a generally oligarchic bent. But the people ejected had been seeking changes that seemed ruinous to a large section of the populace. They likely were so in hock to their Spartan allies that even fellow oligarchs and most of the rest of the population regarded their presence as inimical to the future of the city as an autonomous unit. Suspensions that must have been confirmed when on being expelled their Peloponnesian League friends allowed them to settle at Plataea, a place that they had so recently laid waste. Despite being outside the walls this group remained troublesome; having armed themselves, in the following year they came right back. They took over Pegae, the Corinthian gulf port by coup de main, and so denied those who had thrown them out the possibility of carrying in supplies that way. Now, with this chocking off of the western trade route, it was no wonder the citizens were getting taut as a bowstring.

Athenian harassment and this internal trouble had knocked the stuffing out of a leadership that had remained on the Peloponnesian side even if they wanted no part of the Spartan domination touted by the exiles. Their solid support had been worn down by the damage done to the property of their followers and now this spavined crew displayed little backbone when the relatives of the exiles at Pegae became more insistent in demanding that this recalcitrant crew be recalled. By 424 BC the pro-exile faction in the city were getting more and more support, claiming that the price of letting the exiles back was well worth it to open the supply route they controlled. But this prospect was grim indeed to any democrats, who feared the vengeance of the putative returnees; who, supported by like minded oligarchs still in town, might exact a heavy toll against anyone tainted with involvement in ejecting them in the first place. These populars might have chosen in the past to work in coalition with moderate oligarchs in a patriotic anti-Athenian stance but if the exiles came back it would be their ruin and any further accommodation would be impossible. It was not just their advantage they were looking to now; many felt it was survival at stake. This was the context as a significant number of them came to the conclusion that they had no option but strike a deal with the old enemy.

The Attic capital was not far, and it was easy for representatives to make contact with the Athenian generals Hippocrates and Demosthenes. Once word was abroad that the exiles might be on the way back, they offered to let Athenian forces into the long walls. The possession of the Sphacteria prisoners might mean Athens was no

longer quite so afraid of invasion by Sparta but still the opportunity to regain control of Megara was not to be sneezed at when it came begging. And the fact that it had been the Athenians who had built the walls from the city to Nisaea in the first place made the suggestion even more attractive. These two generals now assured the agents from Megara not only that they were up for the attempt but that they could ensure against retribution from the Peloponnesians by evicting their garrison from the port of Nisaea, and any other of their troops occupying the city or acropolis. A night approach was agreed on and commenced when 600 Athenians under Hippocrates crossed the bridge over the marshy channel from Minoa and hid themselves in some old clay diggings near the long walls until the time was right. This effort was to be seconded by Demosthenes leading some light-armed Plataeans and a frontier guard unit, also intending to lay up in ambush just outside the long walls.

A fifth column had been preparing the ground. Megaran merchants, in on the plan, had lulled the Peloponnesian guards into a sense of security by establishing a routine of taking a blockade-running rowboat out of an entrance in the long walls on a cart. On the prearranged night the conspirators cut down the guard at the gate and to keep it ajar the transport and boat were parked between the jams. Demosthenes, primed and ready, gave the order and his commandos raced for the gate they saw swinging open before them. Once inside it came to real fighting as the garrison troops nearby, warned now, formed up to make a defence. But shaken and disorientated they could not hold the desperate men coming down on them. The hoplites under Hippocrates, also alerted, surged forward. They began clearing the walls of any of the enemy prepared to make a fight of it. These were few enough particularly when they saw the locals in arms against them, which suggested that the whole town had gone over to the Athenians. This reasonable assumption was only reinforced by an Athenian herald calling out to the Megarans to join their ranks. For the defenders, convinced they were being attacked in tandem by the Athenians and their old allies, the only way out seemed to be to forget defending the walls and to retreat back to their citadel in Nisaea itself.

The sun, as it burned off the morning haze, revealed the walls in Athenian hands, and the Peloponnesian garrison cowering at the port. The invaders, who had now been reinforced by 4,000 Athenian hoplites and 600 cavalry waiting at Eleusis, tried to really count coup and take Megara itself. In that place all was confusion, some

democrats were demanding they lead out the levy to take back the walls but really with the intention of allowing the Athenians into town. Their leading activists are described as having covered themselves in oil so the Athenians would recognise them as they tried to facilitate their entry. But the city leadership realised what was happening just in time and kept the gates closed so the Athenian army had to turn away and return their attention to forcing the surrender of the garrison at Nisaea. This port had connections with Athens from way back. Around 565 BC the putative ruler of Athens, Pisistratus, had made his name by attacking it, creating something of a template for the kind of khaki coups that led to the establishment of tyrants at this time. Then, back before the Thirty Years Peace, it had long been held by an Athenian garrison, and giving it up had been one of the hardest things to take in that agreement ratified in the winter of 446/445 BC.

This Saronic gulf seaport now briefly became the epicentre. Iron, wood, everything needed, and the masons to use them were hurried up from Athens to build a barrier across between the long walls and on down each side to the coast cutting the garrison off completely. Local timber and masonry from houses, and anything to hand was used. Whole houses were fortified and incorporated to become part of the barricade structure. Hardly more than a day was required to complete it, and this evidence of intent undermined any determination to resist that may have been left in the hearts of the defenders. With no chance of food being brought from Megara or shipped into a harbour blockaded by Athenian ships, they would starve anyway, so surrender was not long in coming. All that was required was an agreement that the Athenians would ransom any non-Spartan prisoners at a stipulated price.

While all this activity in the Megarid was brewing, there is little information on what Brasidas had been doing after he had fallen wounded in the attack on Pylos. We do not know how serious his injury was, but presumably it had not been too bad, as Greek medical services, though pretty good for a pre-modern age, often could do little against infections that so often followed significant battle wounds. In these empty months he must have convalesced at his home in the Eurotas valley, before returning to normal life of the communal mess, while he regained his strength, and toned mind and body to war fitness. This must have been a period of thinking for him, and the idea of opening a front in Thrace was probably the result. And it turned out this project was acceptable to his superiors because of two key factors.

First, he was asking for little in the way of resources, indeed hardly any of what mattered, *agoge*-trained Spartan warriors. It was a strategy on the cheap, and Sparta would pay no tribute of sons for this enterprise. Brasidas might be one of the city's great commanders. But, where he was going, they were not about to risk the blood of the sons of peers. The other plus was his idea did not involve a direct attack on Attica, so it did not place the prisoners at Athens at risk. The stress of war had even made an old school polity like Sparta consider doing something innovative in the way they organized their military endeavours. This capacity had been illustrated in 425 BC when, for the first time, they recruited cavalry. Sparta, like most Greek communities, had originally been ruled by a cavalier elite but that had been before the Lyncurgan revolution that had turned them into heavy infantry hoplites par excellence. But now these new units did not attract the kind of quality of recruit that filled the phalanx; though, accompanied by archers, these horsemen were at least available to act as a mobile and speedy defence force to respond to enemy strikes around the circumference of the Peloponnese. Sparta might nestle behind the bulwark of the Taygetos mountains against threats from the west but elsewhere she was much more open, and needed guarding.

The army that Brasidas was about to raise would show what changes even these lovers of unchanging immutable values were now prepared to sponsor. Helots had fought and died for their masters since time immemorial, following them on campaign as servants and acting in battle as javelin men, shield and litter bearers. Hundreds of unmentioned helots must have died at Thermopylae and at Plataea, where we know as many as 35,000 served, presumably suffering disproportionately with no big shield or armour to protect them against Persian arrows. These men would always have been the bravest and most adventurous of their class. They followed the drum to war, and these were exactly qualities that could only worry the Spartan establishment. There is a story that, on an occasion not long before, 2,000 helots, who had shown bravery and initiative in supporting their Spartiate masters in war, were picked out as if for reward but then butchered, a disposal so awful and yet so typical of the Spartan mindset. When this took place it was obviously felt such a number of potential recruits could be discounted, but not now. Hundreds of Spartans were under lock and key. The rest were required for homeland defence whether it be guarding the coast or to counter the sort of helot rising the Athenians were hoping to encourage from

their posts around the Peloponnese. Certainly Perioci recruits had long plugged some gaps in the army's ranks but now something else was required. It made even the Spartans contemplate something extraordinary. This was the recruiting and arming of helots as hoplites, with the incentive to fight given by the promise of freedom and 'ten acres and a cow' when they demobbed.

Brasidas raised 700, or 1,000 if Diodorus is credited, as the core of his army. He provided weapons for them all as they certainly did not have the wherewithal to buy their own equipment. We do not hear of any Spartiates or Perioci signing on as part the force but it is surely probable that there was a small cadre, to provide leadership for the rank and file and be available for independent commands that were bound to crop up, particularly when captured or allied towns needed to be garrisoned. To recruit the balance of the army required word was passed to gather the best available mercenaries in the Peloponnese who had not already gone to war. These provided heavy hoplite infantry. These were men from the allied cities who had either got used to the military life over the years and had no desire to return to their farms, or, more often, had got into debt and finding their living on the land compromised had little choice except to hire out as professional killers. The Spartan commander got 1,700 soldiers altogether, and had them encamped near Corinth and Sicyon when news of what was happening at Megara became common knowledge.

Events had shipped him up at this frontline in the prologue to what were to be the defining activities of his short time in the limelight. The war he intended to start in Thrace was going to have to wait while he responded to desperate calls from Peloponnesian officers and Megaran oligarchs to save them from disaster. Sidetracked from the task he had set out upon, to fight fires, he anyway showed his usual enterprise. Getting plenty of local backing he marched with 2,700 Corinthian hoplites, 400 more from the small town of Phlius, twenty miles to the west, and 600 Sicyonians, solid friends from further along the Corinthian gulf. When they started out, Brasidas was not aware that the Athenians had actually taken Nisaea, and to rescue the garrison there was undoubtedly the first task he had hoped to perform. Just as important as the men, he took himself to this local emergency; he found he had allies who were prepared to stump up plenty in an attempt to put back the genie of a pro-Athenian Megara in its bottle. The Boeotians had pledged support, and if their army materialised then Brasidas might hope to make pretty short work of

whatever numbers the Athenians had come in.

A night march over the Isthmus, and stumbling round the shoulder of Mount Gerania, had revealed the strength of the enemy's position. Brasidas did not hesitate to call for help; that the Boeotians should rendezvous with him on the eastern slopes of the hills at a village called Tripodiscus. It was when he got there he first received firm news that the Athenians instead of just buzzing around Nisaea had captured the place. It had only taken two days to gain control of the port and the long walls, which they broke down where they joined the defences of Megara city. Indeed they had almost succeeded in taking the town itself, and it was a race now. If Brasidas was to save the city he needed to act. He rushed 300 picked men down the road to try and put some steel in the defence. Once there he found the leadership inside Megara in a complete stew. For many it was a choice of ruin or retreat, those of the governing group who had been involved in expelling the exiles were worried the Spartans would force them to take them back, while others were more concerned the popular party would bring civil war to the city streets if they thought the exiles were returning. And that this would allow the Athenians in. Fear of action had taken hold as they decided that their best policy was to do nothing until it became clearer which of their bellicose visitors would prove the stronger. Being stung for the bill from whichever side was asked for aid was an ever present fear so the gate remained closed to Brasidas. In this confused situation he and his advance guard had little choice but to return to Tripodiscus where they rejoined the rest of his army. Once back, at the break of the next day as the men in the Peloponnesian encampment stirred, they were encouraged to see 2,200 Boeotian hoplites and 600 horse marching down from the Cithaeron hills on the Pegaea road. With these new arrivals, Brasidas could deploy some 6,000 heavy spearmen, plenty enough to face the Athenians with confidence.

But for the moment, the move he made was one just involving his cavalry. When news reached the Athenians, about this new player who threatened to turn the tables, is not clear. Maybe they were very lax. Maybe they were lacking knowledge when they sent out most of their light troops to beat up the country between the sea and the town. Their *peltasts* and other unarmoured men had split into small parties to wreck the landscape and make free with any goods the Megaran husbandmen had not been able to hide or get under cover. This was the circumstance when the Boeotian troopers sent in by



Brasidas kicked things off. These were well-armoured cavaliers on decent mounts, who came cantering on between the fields and down the roads past the city to overrun an enemy intent on piling up their booty for carrying away. They might be riding horses that would seem quite small against medieval or modern equivalents, and did not have the benefit of stirrups or saddles, but animal and rider together were extremely intimidating to men more intent on loot than fighting an active and well equipped foe. It was a turkey shoot, with the eager troopers chasing the startled plunderers out of fields and farm houses, and reeling down the roads leading towards the sea.

It would have gone very hard for these light troops. It could have been a bloodbath if it had not been that there were Athenian cavalry ready to counter Brasidas' move. Some 600 Athenian cavalry advanced into the fight, catching their Boeotian equivalents disordered by their own success. Now there occurred an action that lasted for a considerable length of time and most unusually did not involve at all the ubiquitous hoplite or indeed any other sorts of infantry. This was like JEB Stuart and Alfred Pleasonton, at Brandy station or Waller and Wilmot at Roundway Down. This was a kind of action that was quite infrequent in all of ancient Greek history, despite the fact that in most societies the richest class provided the cavalry. It is the infantryman, whether Greek hoplite, Macedonian *phalangite* or Roman legionary, who dominate both the reality and the mythology of combat. Not that ancient horsemen were ineffective, and indeed, after the advent of Macedonian power became more important, they could do pretty much what most cavalry did throughout history, scouting, protecting the armies flanks and pursuing a broken enemy. They might have ridden unshod horses but they were well armed and trained to a much greater degree than their footslogging compatriots. And while the body armour of most hoplites was becoming lighter during the period of the Peloponnesian war the evidence of paintings and grave Stele suggest most cavalrymen kept a stout corselet of reinforced linen, or a cuirass of bronze, with a helmet and tough boots. They were well protected men, cavaliers on decent mounts, usually carrying two javelins, a thrusting spear and a sword, frequently the *kopis*, a heavy chopping weapon ideal for cutting down enemies running for their lives.

Greece, by and large, was not a country of wide grassy prairies, so to maintain much of a mounted arm was always going to be problematic in many places. Thessaly and, to a degree, Boeotia were

the exceptions. The former was known for her horsemen and the latter, although surrounded by mountains and peppered by large lakes, was not a country of narrow valleys and rocky hills that was the norm in the Peloponnese, and much of the rest of Greece. So they could sustain equestrian warriors who had won a considerable reputation. In Boeotia 1,100 were drawn from the affluent oligarchs that mainly ran the region in the fifth century. But they were exceptional. In other places horsemen were few, and, even in Athens, the history of the cavalry arm is erratic. They seem to have usually retained a small but well-honoured force, although there is a complete absence of any mention of them in the Persian wars. Indeed, they frequently made use of allied Thessalian horse until these auxiliaries let them down during a combat at Tanagra in the 450s. The home grown corps developed from the very small number mobilised in Solon's day, in the sixth century, that later expanded to 300 under two officers called *polemarchs*. During the middle of the fifth century a massive increase in numbers occurred to 1,000 troopers, 100 drawn from the richest families of each of the ten tribes commanded by *phylarchs*; a troop that was backed up with 200 mercenary horse archers.

This Megaran campaign had seen the Athenians really pulling out the stops, sending the greatest number of troopers ever mobilised during the war. Indeed it must almost have been the whole complement as there would not have been that many more than these 600 still active after several years of war where the cavalry arm had been well utilised. Since 431 BC, these horsemen had ridden out to try and defend the property of the citizens crammed in between the long walls and behind Athens defences. Homeland defence had been all about the good use of troopers, and the regular trashing of the Megaran countryside had also been keeping them busy. This kind of activity would have led to extensive attrition, to disabled troopers and to dead or broken down mounts. Though this did, at least, mean that those still fighting were veterans, well on their metal and very capable when it came to facing up to even the best cavalry that the enemy could field. It shows how important this campaign was regarded that the Athenians sent so much of what was left of the military establishment. This is particularly noteworthy as it followed years of citizens dying early due to those two apocalyptic horsemen, war and plague.

Cavalry generally fought in a formation four deep, essentially a

kind of mounted phalanx. This was pretty basic, without the advantages of the wedge or rhomboid configurations used by Thessalian and Macedonian troopers, people who retained a much more cavalier-centric military ethos. Still, even in this shape, they retained that ability to intimidate infantrymen, experiencing the awesome sight of beasts and man galloping towards them. Cavalry against infantry was always something of a chicken run, neither horse nor man would generally complete a charge against solid infantry showing a line of spear points to the breast of the onrushing beats. But then again, many infantry would not stand when they saw these mounted terrors tearing down onto them. Cavalry had done plenty in these years, as even stirrupless men without saddle trees to anchor them could be pretty intimidating, and in any age it was the terror of the charge that broke the men facing it, rather than the actual impact. When contact occurred the target was already beaten, turned ready to run and then it was all over and the pursuing troopers would take what toll they could. But if the infantry stood solid then the attackers would not complete the assault. The horses would refuse or the riders pull them up, reluctant to waste expensive horse flesh by skewering it on the spear points in front, never mind what those same razor sharp blades might do to the riders. The most that might be attempted would be to throw their javelins against the enemy in front of them, hoping the wounds inflicted would disrupt and weaken so the recipients might collapse when faced with another onslaught.

Now these effective Athenians were going to disappoint their Boeotian counterparts who thought they smelt an easy win on the wind against feebly-armed enemy looters. The cavalry cantered out to spread amongst the fields and olive groves that descended to the sea, and after a thunderous approach ended brawling with spears and javelins against the enemy, while the foot soldiers fled for any cover they could find. This battle of horsemen took time, with ranks of horse charging and then reforming to go in again wave after wave. It was a pretty equal contest, with both sides being proficient and highly motivated. First one side surged forward, the troopers following the example set by their gaudy officers, causing a fragmentation of the opposing battle line, and then the defenders rallied, wheeling round to return to fight, to force the aggressor back into open retreat. Then, increasing the confusion, each side's reserve squadrons erupted into the fray in turn; each booming down on enemies who were disordered and exhausted by combat. There was little to give either of the combatants the edge and it was only really fatigue that separated the

sides. However, the Athenians claimed sufficient success to warrant a trophy when the general of the Boeotian horse and some of his companions were killed. This bloodletting occurred just as the combat approached the walls of Nisaea, so allowing the Athenians who occupied the defences, to keep the bodies, strip them of their arms, and only return the corpses when the Boeotians came back for them under truce.

From the walls of Megara the city leaders had watched as the cavalry duelled, but it had not been decisive. So now Brasidas, well aware of the eyes on him, put his whole army into battle formation and then in motion towards the Athenian main army positioned at Nisaea. The Athenians hoplites down by the port were also drawn up with phalanx formed and bristling, ready to face what might come their way. The extended lines faced each other for some time as Brasidas waited for his enemy to attack. But an amount of diffidence soon became manifest amongst the Athenian leadership. Demosthenes and Hippocrates were aggressive and imaginative generals as past and future campaigns had and would show. But now they began to consider that they were somewhat outnumbered and that they had already done well by securing the port and the long walls. While victory in the field might not bring great benefits, defeat outside a potentially hostile Megara could be disastrous. So, after a face off that lasted some time the expected clash of battle lines did not occur. But Brasidas at least had the satisfaction of seeing his enemy back off and withdraw behind the defences of Nisaea, and, more importantly, he received news that the city administration had seen the way the wind was blowing and were now prepared to eagerly welcome the Peloponnesian force through the gates of Megara town itself.

The government in Megara, who had waited in high expectation, observing the manoeuvring of the armies outside, had had to make some decisions. The strength of the two sides had seemed sufficiently matched to suggest that a battle would be the outcome and after that they expected the way to jump would become clear. Whatever their personal inclinations they knew they would have to come to terms with whichever side won out on the field of combat. But no such great confrontation occurred. Brasidas was up for it, he had the larger army in good spirits, but the Athenians were less enthusiastic. A result that perhaps anyway suited most in Megara, loathing of their neighbourhood rival still trumped any fear of a Peloponnesian League success, so they were not unhappy when it became clear the Athenian

hoplites still stood in considerable fear of the Spartan-led force. Demosthenes and Hippocrates once they had decided not to risk battle could do little but take their army home, leaving only the garrisoned posts at Nisaea, on Minoa and Salamis. In the end these generals were leery of loosing hometown blood when the sons, fathers, uncles and cousins of those who fell would be waiting in an assembly with a reputation for taking it out on officers who were less than completely successful. In terms of Athens strategic interest, the reason to fight was not that strong. In the first years of the war they were very keen to control Megara to plug the invasion road that enemies would take to harry Attica but now this was much less of a factor. The hostage situation, with over 100 Spartan prisoners held at Athens, meant there was now much less risk of Spartan kings and invading enemy armies appearing grim and determined on the Megara road.

This affair is salutary, a lesson against seeing Greek city politics too simplistically, of failing to notice some pretty pivotal paradoxes. Class was at the centre, the Greeks knew all about the brutal divisiveness of wealth differential; aristocratic oligarchs, new money demagogues, middle income farmers, labourers and mariners, all organized along a continuum, and around these fault lines other factors impacted too. Patriotism could become an overriding factor for some whatever their economic situation. But old elites always scrapped to retain their rights, even against those trying to share just a little bit. It was a vicious cocktail of snobbery and caste privilege underpinning an ideology that allowed treason before it countenanced sharing. The rich, in any age when a portion of their wealth or power is demanded, are normally hugely unforgiving and this was absolutely the case in the Hellenic world, and they were ready to countenance bedfellows of any ilk to keep themselves at the top and to ensure the ladders were kicked away from those trying to climb up. This select few who found their dominance threatened by fellow citizens wanting to get out from under debt and gain a more equitable share of land, often saw Sparta as their best hope in defending the status quo in their own communities. This had been behind much of the domestic chaos at Megara. A governing group who were largely pro Spartan had allowed the people to suffer massively from the bruising of a powerful neighbour. But not all were prepared to completely disregard the priorities of the nation for those of their group; most of the democrats were far from pro Athenian and indeed they were as fearful as any that the Spartans would permanently cede control of Nisaea to Athens as a pawn to get back the Pylos prisoners. Athens remained, for most

Megarans, a long-term and hated rival. But, after years of swollen bellies, the desire to eat became the dominant motive. This meant people could begin to think of dumping the oligarchs who had led them for years and some even contemplate an arrangement with their bitter local foe. This did not mean the citizenry of Megara had suddenly become Athens lovers. They just hoped that an arrangement might be contrived to allow them to be left alone.

This was, almost certainly, the context that saw most of the wise heads agreeing to the extreme pro Spartans being exiled. Yet it did not help at all and indeed these men ended up blocking off the chance of food coming through Pegae. It had been out of the frying pan into the fire. The administration that had thrown them out was pretty pragmatic but when they looked about to reverse things and bring them back there were plenty of Jacobins completely unprepared to compromise. Democrats preferred even subjugation to Athens to allowing their domestic enemies home. But now, with Brasidas having seen off the Attic menace, the returned exiles had got themselves back on top, and, despite promising to take no revenge, they arrested and executed plenty of those who had either believed their assurances or failed to flee in time. Indeed to ensure that the future would be one totally dependent on their Spartan friends they razed the long walls to the port. The presence of these Athenian-built defences could only encourage those who would want to establish an autonomy fed by imported food brought in with help of their friends at the port of Nisaea. A later source even claims Nisaea itself was retaken at this time. But this is not reported by others, and the terms of the truce agreed the next year suggest it was still then in Athenian hands.

Brasidas had done very well. His achievements suggested a different kind of Spartan. These people were famous for their military might, tenacity and integrity, qualities that made them feared by enemies and cherished by friends. But few of their leaders had ever been credited with the personal touch. From Laconic we get the modern word laconic, and being Laconic was indeed synonymous with being laconic. It was not saying much, and such people are difficult to know and love. However, this man was different and the difference is remarked and evidenced throughout his career. Here was a Spartan who could engage and persuade and he was going to show it in the Chalcidice. Part of course was necessity; in the north he had an admittedly tight but slight military force at his back and had to make friends to make progress. But it was more than this. He either

genuinely lacked the kind of condescension and arrogance so many of his fellows showed, or had the sensitivity to disguise it when dealing with those he needed to win over. And another factor is that we do not hear of him sticking hard to other people's money as so many of his compatriots would when they found themselves with access to it. These qualities, as well as his military ones had helped in allowing him to fix the Megara problem. So, with the city secure, and the Boeotians and key supporters sent home, the general took the road back to the Isthmus, where the crisis had initially found him, making final preparations for his march to Thrace.

It had already been a busy fighting season but now, in high summer, Brasidas got on with what he had intended as the main effort from the start. Some 1,700 hoplites were the core of the army he took with him, raised from Laconian helots, and armed by the state, or mercenaries from other parts of the Peloponnese. There is no mention of cavalry or light infantry as part of the body of men who trailed out of Corinthia, and this should be no surprise as Sparta had not been great producers of horsemen for centuries and the land they were going to was the home of *peltasts* who could be picked up easily once they arrived. And of course the man who was urging him north could bring to the table those noble, well accoutred and spirited troopers who were the heart of the Macedonian army. It was mid August 424 BC as they started out, taking a hoplite's normal three days supplies on the first stage of the journey to the Spartan colony of Heraclea in Trachis. This place so recently planted by Brasidas' old comrade Alcetas is the first stop mentioned, and the shortest route would have been to ferry the men across the Gulf of Corinth through Phocus to a friendly Boeotia, then directly northwest, past Elatea and through Eastern Locris. If the Phocus route was not without its dangers in that politically complicated region, there was a longer overland road. This would have meant a return to the Megarid; before tramping over the Cithaeron hills to debouch somewhere near Plataea, then firmly in the hands of their Theban friends. From there it was almost a hundred miles but food would have been provided by friendly villages, happy to make money out of the special markets arranged to feed these newly-arriving hungry mouths.

The soldiers would have had some things in common with the locals in the places they were traversing. But they had much that differentiated them too. The helots in Brasidas' army would have talked in a dialect that was very different from that of the people of

central Greece. Any likelihood of straggling was also reduced because they were not in country where the men had family, friends or contacts, where those sick of the military life could call on people to comfort and hide them. These ex-slaves might not love their Spartan leaders but they had little option but to follow them, when a brisk march along the coast road brought the army to Heraclea and familiar faces. This was a frontier town where communal solidarity was the *sine qua non* of survival, where they were not likely to find any sympathy for an expressed desire to desert the colours. So these men, the most active, brave and intelligent of a class that the Spartans had oppressed for so long found little option but to make the most of the life they had been given. It was a military life; but one that might have seemed an improvement over the drudgery of a field hand's existence, one where a man might, at any time, be knifed in the back by some eager graduant of the *agoge*.

The mountains of south and central Greece that they were traversing are rugged with deep gorges and dry washes, a morphology that made only a few roads easily passable, and those slow for pack animals or the ox carts used to carry arms and supplies. Otherwise there were just goat tracks, far from ideal for a fully-laden army. Occasionally, a passing force would build roads for themselves as they went along. But not now when they were unlikely to be coming back the same way soon. So, apart from these perennial difficulties and the risk of being molested by belligerent locals, getting through to Heraclea was a real achievement. That new-founded community could not have amounted to much after only a few years of existence but it least offered a resting place, to make running repairs to their equipment and build the *esprit de corps* that would become increasingly evident in the months to come. While the men enjoyed pain-free feet, full stomachs and, no doubt, the opportunity to fraternise with the locals, their commander laid his plans for what he knew would be a considerably more perilous stage of the journey to come. The thoroughfare was north, past the Malian gulf and the hills round Melitaea where the country spread out into the first of two large plains. On the southeast of which sat the town of Pharsalus, and after a low line of hills separated it from the other centred at Larissa to the northeast. One of the rises was called Cynoscephalae, the dog's-head hill, strategic terrain that would see two great battles in the centuries to come, the first between Greeks from Boeotia and Thessalians from Pherai in 364 BC, the other between the Macedonians and Romans in 197 BC.



This was a land of high horse cavaliers. They were aristocrats who lived off serf-tilled fields. But though these people took the lead in most things, there were cities, too, that produced a levy of hoplites drawn from middling farmer stock, and light infantry recruited from the less well off. That the Spartans had some friends in the region should be little of a surprise. The system that supported the knights of Thessaly was not so different from their own helot based arrangements. And Brasidas during a hiatus near Thermopylae, while others made a tourist trip to visit the battlefield shrine, had sent envoys to contact sympathisers in Pharsalus town. Several magistrates from there came to meet the Spartan army at Melitaea and along too came another man, described as the 'Chalcidian *proxenus*', representing the interests of a number of Chalcidian towns. We also hear about others from Larissa, particularly one Niconidas who was a friend of the Macedonian king. Whether he joined at Melitaea or later we do not know. Yet what is undisputed is that the pro Spartan network in Thessaly was putting its best foot forward.

To cross this country was always going to be difficult, as many locals, especially those on friendly terms with Athens, would not be keen on an army of strangers entering their lands. Even neutrals might worry who these armed newcomers would take a swipe at en route. So this was the fraught context when the intruders arrived at the Enipeus river, not far from Melitaea, where they found a swiftly mobilised group of Thessalian cavaliers on the far side. These men made them aware they were far from happy that they had entered the country without permission and for a time it looked to Brasidas that he would have to fight his way through even before reaching the region where he planned to campaign. But now his local contacts showed their worth, persuading their fellow countrymen that the Spartans had no evil intent and that it was only Athenians they wanted to fight. The group blocking the way were clearly in a quandary. They did not want to take on this tough-looking army if they could help it, particularly as having assembled so quickly they could not be sure which side those Thessalians who were not with them, would come down on. It was one thing to make a protest, but quite another to start a war without having properly tested their neighbours' intentions.

In the light of this, the party blocking the river crossing decided to disperse and determine exactly what their compatriots wanted to do about these intruders. Whether there was an agreement that Brasidas should wait while they consulted is not known but surely likely. But

on the advice of his local friends, now the opportunity was there, the Spartan decided to press straight on. It was all rush now, and the helot hoplites, the other Peloponnesians and their local outriders pushed at full speed, making Pharsalus in a day, and only dropping their packs, exhausted, to construct a marching camp by the banks of the River Apidanus. They only stayed there sufficient time to get some sleep and rest their animals before pushing on again, with anxious looks behind, anytime expecting to see the dust of a pursuing army. But Phacium, halfway to Larissa, was reached with no sign of a chasing pack, and soon Larissa itself was passed, and the steep sides of the Vale of Tempe were in view. It was possible for the interlopers to begin to lighten up on precautions against attack. Once through the five miles of this dramatic defile, where a narrow track marked the last stage of the passage into Macedonia, they found themselves in Perrhaebia. This was a frontier country, where, despite the place being generally regarded as under Thessalian control, the people turned out very welcoming. The journey's dangers were now considered sufficiently a thing of the past that Brasidas' escort of pro-Spartan Thessalians could go home as the army marched onto the Macedonian city of Dium. This was a place, just below the slopes of Mount Olympus, that would, in centuries to come, be where Macedonian kings would muster their armies before heading south to impose a hard-won hegemony on the states of Greece. Now they were in their allies' country, and Brasidas and his men could properly relax as they travelled the coast road, past Pydna, Methone and round the Thermaic gulf in the direction of the Chalcidice peninsula. Though there were people on the ground here who had been calling for their intervention, the region was still a political minefield, and it was far from clear who was stirring to join them, who would stay neutral and who fight them. How the newcomers navigated all this would be a crucial factor in the unrolling of the next stage of the Peloponnesian war.

## *Chapter Eight*

### **Up North**

The northern country Brasidas had come to was not that typical of peninsular Greece, where, apart from Thessaly and parts of Boeotia, arable country was at a premium. This was a more expansive landscape, with wide valleys, river deltas, open plough land broken by slight rises and belts of mixed woodland as well as the high and rocky terrain that is never far away in any part of Greece. The country was divided into several distinct regions. To the west was Macedonia, centred on the valleys of the Axios and the Haliacmon, reaching the sea at the Thematic gulf, and with its influence extending south to Mount Olympus, famous as the home of gods revered by all members of the Hellenic family, however much they differed in the accents of their speech or the structure of their polities. This kingdom that soon would send out worldconquering armies was, at this time, a fragile patchwork occupying the top of the Greek land mass, before it petered out north and east into a world of barbarian tribes who culturally shared even less with Hellenes than the Macedonians, who some of their more snobby Greek cousins hardly considered as one of themselves at all. So, unsurprisingly, this people had some of the eagerness of parvenus as they lapped up yarns about a pedigree that claimed ancestors arriving with Dorus, son of Hellen and the eponymous founder of the Dorian people. Macedonia had, in common with so many other places, slowly coalesced through a combination of conquest, dynastic marriage and clever diplomacy, and, in the middle of the fifth century, was largely centred on the south-eastern plains around the two rivers. There, marshes had been drained and waterways near the coast channelled, to allow the kind of agriculture that might nourish an expanding population. The open plains to the north and east were ideal for cattle that sustained a horse-riding barony. These could provide a seasoned and effective heavy cavalry for any king who might retain their loyalty. And this might not be easy where politics were personal. Being a friend of the king meant advancement and riches whereas falling out with him might mean degradation and even death, and, for the monarch, a failure to retain the support of these crucial men would almost certainly end in deposition.

Alexander I had beefed up the state during the last half century,

when nimble footwork had allowed him to avoid much damage from either the hands of Xerxes or his enemies in the period of the Persian invasions of the Balkans. It is difficult to completely understand what he was about during these years, but what is clear is that when the Persians arrived in strength he made himself as amenable as possible to the Great King. While, equally, this man, who claimed descent from Argive ancestors, themselves boasting a line back to Heracles, and who sent teams to the Olympic Games and patronised Greek poets, kept in touch with the Hellenic coalition. He warned them about the danger of their defensive position at Tempe being outflanked, then also advised of the plans of the Persian general Mardonius before the battle of Plataea in 479 BC. A trimmer he was then, but one who, when the Persian invasion subsided, was well set to fill the vacuum their departure left.

Alexander chose the victors' side, still a fateful and perilous step against a superpower like Persia, and he hounded the retreating intruders on their way. It is even claimed that his men killed 43,000 of the Asian invaders' rearguard under Artabazus, mostly around the estuary of the Strymon river. This allowed expansion eastwards to the hills of Thrace, and gave his kingdom access to the mineral-rich country near Mount Pangaeus. There is little of coincidence in the fact that, soon after Alexander I had accomplished this incorporation, Macedonian coins first began to be minted. Nor was it just in one direction that Alexander moved. Also firmly acquired in his reign were the coast and much of lowland Macedonia, where he evicted or incorporated the locals he found there; coming in the process cheek by jowl with some proper Greek cities that had been planted years before on the Thermaic gulf. The likes of Methone and Pydna remained characteristically Greek *poleis*, but they accepted the hegemony of the Macedonian monarch, making more complex the pattern of a kingdom where Alexander ruled not just cattle barons and peasant farmers but hoplite planters and merchant traders as well.

There was another Macedonia, an upland region to the north and west of the lowland plains. Here, clans of related peoples, a mishmash of tribes, herded their beasts in their glens, swam and fished in their lakes. They were tough fractious people of Macedonian stock who lived in the regions of Lyncestis, Orestis, Elimiotis, Tymphaea, Eordaea, and Pargonia, with little friendship and less unity. They occupied hilltop forts and lakeside villages and their subservience to the mother kingdom was loose to nonexistent. On occasion, they

might accept control, and allow the collection of tributes and the conscription of their young men, but mostly they were fiercely independent. Crucially, these people occupied the valleys and the gorges that barbarian tribes from the north would pour down in periodic attempts to purloin the riches of the Mediterranean world. Because of this threat they found it just as, if not more, necessary to keep these predatory neighbours sweet as to pay attention to the lowland kingdom of their distant cousins. Molossians and Illyrians, always rowdy and always bellicose, were as important for both these upland peoples' security and opportunity as any other Macedonians or Greeks.



**Map 7: The Chalcidice.**

To the west of the northern kingdom were mountains and rustic folk. To the east was to be found hilly country that soon merged into Thrace, rich in timber and precious metals. The Strymon, with the newly-planted Amphipolis near its mouth, was the main north-south link. Gold and other ores were mined or panned from the rivers, and the good early coins found at Olynthus and Acanthus show their importance for the local economy. To the south, though, was the Chalcidice. Below the long, narrow Lake Bolbe was a wide fist of country 60-odd miles across as the crow flies, and forty deep, with three fingers pushing down into the north Aegean Sea. The Pellene peninsula was on the west, the Sithonian in the middle and Acte on the east, each one thirty to forty miles in length from top to bottom.

The Chalcidice was good country to grow grapes, olives, and cereals, and to graze animals, particularly the southwest section where open land, well watered and fertile, allowed easy cultivation. Eastwards the open plains round Olynthus became higher and rougher, a complex of olive-covered slopes. This was familiar terrain in many ways to most Greeks. The whole was naturally a pull for land-hungry colonists in the eighth and seventh centuries, and from places like the original Chalcis and Eretria, on the west of the long island of Euboea, and Aegean isles like Andros, they came looking for elbow room. Shrewd men, in cities with burgeoning populations, appreciated that, up north, there was country well worth exploiting. This territory had been God's wide acres for outbound Greeks for centuries, and the rolling plains, good for pastoral or arable farming, had looked like smiling country to people from narrow cramped valleys and plains. The newcomers were prepared, if necessary, to displace the local Greek tribes or Thracian-descended natives to get control of their territory. Though the process was not just one of replacement, there was plenty of mixing too.

The towns these Greeks deposited were numerous on the coast, east and west, down the peninsula legs and inland too. On the western shore was Therme, a seventh century foundation built in the middle of malarial swamps that gave it its name, and just southeast of where Thessalonica stands now. Further inland to the east was Olynthus, a place settled since Neolithic times, evidenced by finds from its southern hill. Then, over on the eastern shore was Stagira, settled by colonists from Andros island, and down the coast near the neck of the easternmost promontory was Acanthus, established in the seventh century by an admixture of local people and incomers from Andros and possibly Chalcis too. These were not the only ones. Corinth, in about 600 BC, set up Potidaea at the very head of the Pellene peninsula, blocking a narrow neck where, now, a canal started in Romans times cuts it off. Further down the west leg were Mende and Scione settled by Eritreans and Achaeans respectively, while Sithonia was well developed too, the most important place being Torone established by pioneers from Euboean Chalcis. These were not backwaters, and had produced some great names in their time. Mende boasted Paeonius the sculptor, who beautified the temple to Zeus at Olympia. Later, Aristotle would put Stagira on the map by first seeing the light of days within its boundaries.

But these Greeks were not the only newcomers who left traces in

the Archaic and early Classical age. Another important group were the Bottiaeans who by Brasidas' day were well settled in the west of the region, having been pushed out of that part of the Macedonian heartland on the right bank of the Axios river and replanted on land to the south of Lake Bolbe. They seeped down onto country claimed by occupation or battle from the local Chalcidians. A number of communities are mentioned, like Kalindoia, Kamakai, Tripoiia, Haioleion. Six others, probably Bottiaeans, called Kithas, Tinde, Prassilos, Pleume, Sinos and Thamiskos are name checked in an agreement with Athens in 422 BC. The most important, though, was Spartolos, a few miles west of Olynthus, certainly a Bottiean place before the Persians came. The Edonians were another group who had also experienced eviction from Macedonia but who ended further east in the Strymon valley; Greek speakers who found themselves settled in rich country, centred at Drabescus and Myrcinus.

So it was a mixed bag of peoples at various stages of economic and social development that filled the spaces. Inter-marriage and political bargains had taken off the edges from the beginning, and this shows in the cultural mix of artefacts found in the graves of the elite of this region. An increase in urbanisation meant that interesting changes had occurred. Many country landowners coming from a cattle-baron tradition would now have had town houses too, and become leading citizens eligible to hold magistracies in the urban polities they also called home. The resultant communities were not quite like the classic polis of Attica or Boeotia, but then again not that different. By the fifth century, class divides between rich and poor mattered as much as memories of the ethnic diversity of the constituents of places founded two centuries earlier. It was a part of the world noticed to no small extent during the defining epic when Xerxes led the might of Asia against the delinquent peoples of Greece. The incredible army of invasion described by the 'father of history', after leaving their assembly point at the old Lydian capitol of Sardis, had had hard miles to travel. They passed the ghost-infested fields of the Scamander where the fabulous city of Troy had once stood, and over the famous pontoon bridge that tamed the Hellespont. After a couple hundred more miles on European roads, the good beaches and wide spaces of the Thermaic gulf had proved an ideal stopping-off point for the myriads from the Persian realm, prior to launching into the heartland of Greece itself. Therme city was where Xerxes halted his vast horde, to rest, recuperate and reorder after the long march from Asia. It became the centre of a great camp organized by a commissariat one of

whose most extravagant chores was to deal with lions attacking the pack camels while they travelled the road from Acanthus. The invaders recruited here too. A contingent from the Chalcidice peninsula is mentioned in Xerxes' grand army. The local people had little choice but to join the horde that had entered their country and spread out west to the Haliacmon river in Macedonia, drinking streams dry in their wake. Ships were recruited too, from the coastal towns that possessed them, to join the armada sailing south. From this base, the Great King himself took the precaution of carrying out a shipboard recognizance, to take a look at the road into Thessaly before sending the main army forward that way. And eleven days after the soldiers left, the fleet too set out, to encounter a storm that caused sufficient damage that it partly evened out the odds for the battle of Artemisium, the first, albeit least famous, of the heroic encounters to come in that great confrontation between east and west.

Nor was this the last that these locals saw of the Persians. When the whole enterprise had come a cropper at Salamis, the Persian general, Artabazus, with a reputed army of 60,000, after shipping his maladroit monarch back over the water to Asia, returned to try to secure this region crucial for retaining effective communications with Mardonius in Greece. He attempted to re-establish domination at Potidaea and on the Pellene peninsula, where the inhabitants had revolted as soon as Xerxes left the scene, while simultaneously attacking Olynthus. After taking the latter place in 479 BC, he slaughtered its Bottiaean inhabitants and gave the town over to a collaborator from Torone who repopulated it with enterprising Greeks from nearby Chalcidice. As for Potidaea, there was adventure and intrigue aplenty during the siege, with messages hidden in arrows to communicate with a turncoat from Scione looking to facilitate the Persians in taking the place. This all occurred before the town was eventually saved, when a tidal wave drowned many of the attackers, and allowed the people of Potidaea to swiftly dispatch 300 of their men to fight at Plataea later in the same year. Even with the Greco-Persian war a thing of the past, many places in the Chalcidice did not find the future uncomplicated. With no overarching imperial authority, it soon became clear that they might become a bone to be fought over by ambitious powers who had both suffered from, but also had been energised by, Persian attention. As a squeezed middle, they might anticipate notice from familiar neighbours like Macedonians and Thracians, although it was another who made the most of the opportunities of a post-Persian world. The Athenians, while



campaigning against Achaemenid remnants, also rolled most of the Chalcidian communities up into their expanding empire. It was they who seized the opportunity in a region seldom left in peace, and soon forty cities were noted as Chalcedonian tributaries of the Delian League, ranging from Greek colonies to Bottiaean places like Spartolos.

An Athenian-Macedonian relationship had been well established since the beginning of the fifth century, with a *proxenus* in post at least by the time of Marathon. The association was driven by Athens' need for timber to build her fleets, and this had remained so even since the end of the Persian wars. The native trees of Attica had virtually all been consumed to construct the first great fleet, and, as triremes lasted twenty years at a pinch, another source of timber was crucial. But equally, it was important for the Macedonians who had no other buyer to purchase from them on such a grand scale. But this symbiotic affair had become fraught with tensions once the Athenians established a significant presence in the Chalcidice and Thrace. The temptation, once on the spot, was to play locals off against each other to their own advantage, and the Athenians made little attempt to resist it. Thracian warlords particularly could be persuaded, bribed or tempted into harassing their western neighbours and the dynastic nature of government in both Macedonia and Thrace meant it was tempting and easy to interfere in the interminable family squabbles of the ruling houses.

By the 430s, if Macedonia was still nowhere near what it would become in a hundred years time, still its rulers were feeling increased confidence, and so were less inclined to be pushed around by Greek imperialists from the south. Perdiccas II had become king in about 448 BC, and, if relations had remained normally complex, by the late 430s the king had turned from a friend of Athens to an enemy. The settling of Amphipolis had not helped. Inevitably the Macedonians saw this as competition for the riches of the Strymon valley and the Pangaeus hills. But more immediately Perdiccas had resented the way the Athenians had been making links with his brother and rival Philip. This man had a power base at Amphaxitis, a maritime district of Macedonia on the Axios river. Others were being glad handed by Athenian envoys too, like Derdas who was almost certainly the ruler of Elimeia, a hill canton of Macedonia to the southwest of Perdiccas' realm. The corollary of all this was that the Macedonian king found himself inclined to make as much trouble as he could for the

Athenians, by encouraging places in Chalcidice to revolt, and happily stirring up Sparta and Corinth to get involved, igniting a train that would lead to quite some detonation.

The Chalcidian cities had been creating mechanisms for acting together for some time. We know they had a *proxenus* in Thessaly and that they sent out ambassadors to represent themselves as a collective. So this too was a more confident group, prepared to respond to prompting by Perdiccas. The trigger for trouble turned out to be Potidaea. The Athenians had worried about this place for some time because it was a Corinthian colony that kept a link with the mother city, receiving magistrates every year from there. With the tension between Athens and Corinth growing after the affair at Sybota, it was a concern that this people, in tandem with the Macedonians, might lead the rest of the Delian League members in the area in revolt. In fact, their king was deep in it, even offering to rally round those coastal towns most vulnerable to Athenian sea power. It was suggested that they evacuate their homes, demolish their towns and settle behind the walls of Olynthus for protection, or on Macedonian acres, in Mygdonia near Lake Bolbe, that would be handed over to them for the duration of any war.

To try and guard against northern troubles the Athenians had concentrated on Potidaea. This town stood at the neck of the Pellene peninsula, with its walls stretching from the Gulf of Therme to the Toronic coast, cutting off the country to the south and turning the whole finger of land into a kind of island. Pre-emptively, the Athenians demanded not only that they raze those parts of their walls facing south, and sever their Corinthian connections, but that they provide hostages for their good behaviour too. The local authorities did not wait on events, sending men to Athens to see if they could talk their way out of this. However, getting no joy in their winter discussions there, the Potidaeans became increasingly susceptible to those pressing for a revolt. They had also sent envoys to Sparta. Here, they discovered a people who gave promises of support that they would invade Attica if it came to fighting. It was some time in 432 BC that the revolution rolled out, and feverish news from the north ensured a reaction, with Athens sending forces to try and nip trouble in the bud. In spring, after the envoys had made such harsh demands, thirty triremes and 1,000 hoplites led by Archestratus and five other generals had been dispatched to ensure compliance, and that the contagion of revolt did not spread. But now, with push coming to

shove, a good number of communities in the Chalcidice decided that they had had enough of paying tribute to Athens. They might have been prepared to see their hard-earned money going to beautify the Parthenon and to keep the Athenian navy ruling the waves, but seeing it going to fund the planting of Amphipolis was something else. This was a new settlement that might turn into a direct trading competitor for many of them. Exactly which towns took part in this emancipation push is not clear, but when the dust settled, not only Potidaea but plenty of others, Chalcidian and Bottiaean, were in open rebellion, a movement that city bookkeepers found created a nearly eight-percent-size hole in the imperial tribute receipts.

When the expeditionary force arrived they found that the north had exploded. It was a front on fire. The Athenians, at least, had the consolation that they were not without friends in the fracas, in the guise of the Macedonian pretender Philip, Perdiccas' brother, and Derdas. These two had already invaded Perdiccas' realm with all the troops they could muster. The pot was boiling and the new arrivals raised the stakes, Arcestratus first turned to strike a blow in Macedonia, a strategy that, it transpired, had plenty of support back home when another 2,000 hoplites and forty more ships went as reinforcements under the command of Callias and four other generals. These joined at the original force's advanced base at Therme before advancing to besiege Pydna on the other side of the gulf. This port had a decent harbour from where they could threaten the nearby Macedonian capital of Aegae. This conjunction of two Athenian armies with local allies looked like giving them a good chance of getting established in the Axios valley, but then the direction of travel completely changed, driven by what had taken place in Potidaea. The rebels there had been reinforced by volunteers from Corinth, Peloponnesian mercenaries numbering 1,600 hoplites and 400 light troops led by a very popular commander called Aristeus son of Adimantus, whose own qualities had overcome a stain on the family reputation caused by the failure of his father to cover himself in glory at the battle of Salamis in 480 BC when he commanded the Corinthian squadron.<sup>1</sup>

Now, forty days into the insurgency, this man brought his followers to Potidaea, and in the light of this the milling warriors at Pydna began to consider the business they were currently involved in as something of a sideshow. The enemy concentration not only showed Potidaea would be a very difficult nut to crack, but it also now

threatened the Athenian base at Therme, only forty-odd miles up the coast. So, needing to move against this potential danger, a truce was arranged with the king of Macedonia, and the Athenians marched. The seventy ships cruised along the coast, around the head of the Thermaic gulf. The army went overland. After three days on the move, they established their headquarters in real force twenty-plus miles north up the coast from Potidaea at Gignonus. Some 3,000 Athenian hoplites encamped there; also some local allies and particularly noticed are the 600 first-rate Macedonian horse provided by Philip and Pausanias, pretender princes who must have had considerable clout to mobilise such a number of local bluebloods. The downside of the move, though, was that easing the pressure on Perdiccas enabled him, with 200 of his own cavalry, to march down and join up with Aristeus.

The members of the coalition facing the invaders waiting north of the city had made themselves comfortable, setting up a market to ensure the supply of provisions. When the Macedonian king arrived he was given charge of the whole of the cavalry and allied *peltasts* positioned near Olynthus, while the heavy foot were kept with Aristeus, posted just in front of the northern defences of Potidaea. The intention was that, when the Athenians advanced, Perdiccas' men could threaten to come in behind and take them in the rear. But the invaders knew what was up, and dispatched a covering force of their Macedonian horse and allies, while they broke camp and marched the main body head on towards Potidaea itself. A proper phalanx-against-phalanx clash seemed to be in the making, and, when it occurred, it was a swing-door affair. Aristeus' Corinthians and the best of the rest of the troops on the right drove off the men opposed to them, and pursued. The victors swept onwards, slashing at the backs of the enemy, but their lack of discipline took them away from the battlefield just when, on the other wing, the rest of the Athenians overran their opponents, pushing them back behind the walls of Potidaea. This was the situation that Aristeus discovered when he returned from the pursuit, leaving him little or no choice but to risk taking his men over a breakwater through the water into the city, under a hail of enemy missiles that caused not a few casualties. When the battle began, the men at Olynthus, seven miles away, had been called on for support but the Athenian Macedonian cavalry kept them off without any real fighting taking place. They returned to Olynthus when news came that the Athenians had won the battle. But when casualties were counted it turned out fairly even; Aristeus had lost

about 300 men to the Athenians 150, though amongst these was their general, Callias.

With the attackers having the initiative, a wall was swiftly built to cut off the city from the north. The location of Potidaea meant it was difficult to blockade all round but this was needed if the siege was to bite. So, 1,600 more citizen hoplites were sent under Phormio who disembarked on the south side of the town and set about laying waste the country. Then he completed the cordon, walling up the besieged town from the south, while the ships still on station cut off any access from the sea. Aristeus, seeing the peril they were in, tried to persuade the population to evacuate when the first propitious wind blew up, while he and 500 others remained as garrison. They refused, so he and his men left instead, sneaking past the Athenian guard ships to find refuge near Sermylum, east along the coast. From there, he tried to harry the besiegers while hurrying off messengers for reinforcements. None of it was sufficient, neither getting the siege raised nor indeed stopping Phormio from making inroads into the interior, wrecking the country and perhaps even taking over some poorly defended towns.

This campaign was coming to have far-reaching consequences. It was during the siege that the slow-burning war between Sparta and Athens was finally and formally ignited. It was a *cassis belli* claimed by Spartan envoys when the Athenians refused an ultimatum to lift the blockade. Yet, however crucial their ordeal was to the march of great events, time must have slipped by slowly in this siege, both for the people of Potidaea as well as for the Athenians surrounding them. They found themselves bogged down in a years-long epic in the rolling country around the old Corinthian colony. The nitty gritty of this we know, because amongst the combatants were the philosopher Socrates and a very young Alcibiades, who, in ‘The Symposium,’ praised his old paramour both for his toughness in the harsh winter conditions of the siege and for saving his life when he was wounded in battle:

‘when we later went on a campaign together to Potidaea; and there we were messmates. Well, first of all, he surpassed not me only but everyone else in bearing hardships; whenever we were cut off in some place and were compelled, as often in campaigns, to go without food, the rest of us were nowhere in point of endurance. Then again, when we had plenty of good cheer, he alone could enjoy it to the full, and though unwilling to drink, when once overruled he used to beat us all; and, most surprising of all, no man has ever yet seen Socrates drunk.

Of this power I expect we shall have a good test in a moment. But it was in his endurance of winter – in those parts the winters are awful – that I remember, among his many marvellous feats, how once there came a frost about as awful as can be: we all preferred not to stir abroad, or if any of us did, we wrapped ourselves up with prodigious care, and after putting on our shoes we muffled up our feet with felt and little fleeces. But he walked out in that weather, clad in just such a coat as he was always wont to wear, and he made his way more easily over the ice unshod than the rest of us did in our shoes. The soldiers looked askance at him, thinking that he despised them.’<sup>2</sup>

The walls being defended against the regiments that included these two can still to be seen, much younger medieval ones certainly but the ancient masonry at the base can be discovered in places, and their great strength is obvious. The defences stretched the few hundred yards from the sea on one side to sea on the other where the lovely blue-green waters of a canal now show. But the Athenians were not going to back out now, and two years after the commencement of the siege, in summer 430 BC, Hagnon, the founder of Amphipolis, and Cleopompus, good Pericles’ men, brought reinforcements north, showing how much Athens was prepared to throw at this problem. They took with them some of the same veteran 4,000 Athenian hoplites and 300 cavalry that Pericles had just been leading against Epidaurus and other places in the Peloponnese. Once these men got there, assaults with ladders and rams were tried. However, not only did the new men fail in their assaults but it turned out they had brought the plague with them that had killed so many at home. This spread with devastating effect. Hagnon lost 1,050 hoplites out of 4,000 in forty days. Only Phormio and his 1,600 men were spared contamination as they had already left camp to campaign in the interior.

Despite the commitment, it was not until the winter of 230 to 229 BC that the garrison succumbed. In the end, paucity of supplies did the trick, even leading to cannibalism before they surrendered. The defenders were not alone in suffering. For the attackers it had been an awful business too. The plague lingered as well as the usual sickness endemic in long-standing camps and it had cost Athens the kind of money that distorted the carefully planned military budget Pericles intended should have financed the war for considerably longer than now looked possible. It might only cost about two drachmas a day to pay a soldier and his retainer but when the numbers Athens had up

north were counted it really added up. The Athenians, now under a general by the name of Xenophon, allowed the defenders to leave with clothing for themselves, their families and expenses for the journey to friends in the Chalcidice. This was an outcome that incensed people back home, who resented these desperate foes being set free to fight another day. The concerns of the men on the spot were received with little sympathy. The Athenians had wanted to see the Potidaeans exterminated, and, in the fullness of time, they would take it out on the leaders involved, but for the moment they quickly dispatched colonists to repopulate the highly strategic site.

The fall of Potidaea did not completely solve Athens' northern predicament. She had much to do to regain the ground lost in the area. The length of time it had taken to capture the city had allowed other rebellious tributaries a breathing space. So, on the opening of the new campaigning season, with resources released from the siege, the Athenians moved to finish them off. Two thousand hoplites and 200 cavalry under Xenophon marched north in late summer, ravaging just as the crops were ripening up near Spartolos. In 429 BC, this rebel stronghold, finding itself at the centre of rough Athenian attention, sent to Olynthus for help, and when these neighbours arrived were able to confront the invaders in battle. Athenian hoplites turned out too good for the local infantry, driving them back to the city walls, but the native horsemen found things easier, seeing off the enemy troopers, and, indeed, when more reinforcements arrived from Olynthus a second attack drove into Xenophon's army, panicking the already-blooded troops, and killed 430 as well as all their generals. It had turned out militarily different in this part of the world of wide-open country where a phalanx would find its flanks exposed to the kind of cavalry that the region produced in abundance. Conflict here was as much about the sound of thundering hooves as the high cadences of the hoplite paean, when cavalry and *peltasts* were the deciding force rather than the bronze-clad footmen.

From the start, the north had been crucial in the ignition of the Peloponnesian war, but for the Athenians it had remained a focus in a way not true for her opponents. News from the region always garnered attention in the Agora and council chamber when the siege of Potidaea was ongoing. The costs, sufficient to make conservative financiers catch their breath, were 1,000 talents a year, an outlay that might threaten long-laid economic projections. But the Chalcidice was not the only place in this region of coin, calories and lumber where

the Athenians showed a determination to remain a key player. During 431 BC she took pains to befriend important people in Thrace. This place had always had a real hold on the Hellenic imagination, redolent of mystery, bacchanalian excess, snakes, priestesses and poets, a potent combination. There were women there crazy enough to tear Orpheus to pieces for failure to show sufficient respect for the god, Dionysus. It was claimed as the most populous place in the world after India and that it could also be the most powerful except that the inhabitants were incapable of combining together. They were a contrary people, who mourned a birth and celebrated a death, and where wives competed to be slaughtered by the grave of their dead husbands, those who were not chosen having ever after to live a life of shame. Homer describes them as wearing their hair long at the top but, apart from products of the imagination, reality impinged when the occasional hired soldier from the country was seen in Athens streets, looking out of place in fox skins as headdress, brightly-coloured cloaks, high fawn-skin boots, javelins, light shield and small dagger.

But plenty of Greeks saw the benefits of penetrating the shadows to discover something of these slightly terrifying but intriguing people on the periphery. After all, they largely ruled the roost in most of the resource-rich Pangaion hills that stood up to 6,000 feet between the Strymon and the Xirotopamos rivers. Covered in ship-making trees, this was a kind of Eldorado where gold and silver had been mined and panned since time immemorial. Although far away, they were still in close enough proximity for people like Athens' tyrant Pisistratus and, of course, Thucydides to fetch up there after the Athenians threw them out. Miltiades had tried his luck there too, looking for a power base somewhat more secure than the affections of his fellow citizens but now, over a half century later, there was another player making an impact. He was Nymphodorus, and in 431 or 430 BC he had been crucial in bringing the Odrysian Thracian rulers and others round to the Athenian side. The abortive push that ended at the battle of Spartolos had almost assuredly had a Thracian dimension, as the Athenians expected military help from that quarter when they commenced the move inland. Things were reaching another level for the Athenians. They were no longer satisfied with dealing with pretenders and local princes from Elimea but were trying to line up great regional barbarian powers on their side.

These same Odrysian Thracians, now encouraged by Hagnon and



other envoys at the king's court promising the support of Athenian soldiers and ships, were about to try for elevation beyond a standing as just local bullyboys. The winter of 329–328 BC saw them bent on moving outwards from a homeland that already stretched between the Haemus and Rhodope mountain ranges, and as far east as the Black Sea. The wealthy, more-settled societies to the west and south became natural targets. The kingdom of Macedonia and the cities of the Chalcidice were always a temptation. Dissension made them vulnerable, and king Sitalces had access to a huge number of active warriors to hurl against these vulnerable neighbours. The mobilisation drew men from an extensive territory. The Getae, horse archers from south of the Danube on fine horses in splendid body armour and wielding long spears, came on the promise of loot. Some ferocious swordsmen called Dii, from the Rhodope signed up as mercenaries or just followed on their own volition. The final estimate was that 150,000 came pouring south over the rough country of Mount Cercine but this has to be an exaggeration to give credence to the line that the Thracians, if ever they got organized, could become the most militarily powerful people in the world. Feeding this number in what is described as 'desolate' country just would not have been possible. Still, the Macedonians were scared to death. This was no border raid and they were bringing, in their train, Perdiccas' brother, Philip, as both justification and auxiliary in the adventure. The defenders could not mobilise anywhere near the numbers they would need to halt the invaders, so, instead, they prepared to do their best from behind the walls of their fortified places. These were few enough in number, and the intruders easily pushed as far as Idomene, despite the heavy-armed Macedonian cavalry harassing them in consummate fashion. It looked like the deluge for a time but, in the end, the intruders failed to get much past Pella and Cyrrhus and the whole enterprise petered out as it became clear that the Athenians had not come through on their assurances of military aid.

With his followers complaining of the increasing cold and lack of supplies, Sitalces decided it would be better to deal with Perdiccas than fight him. Logistics were always crucial, and it is difficult to imagine the invaders conjuring up much sustenance out of the fields around them that they themselves had wrecked. The story is that the Macedonian made the difference by offering his sister Stratonice in marriage to Seuthes, the nephew of Sitalces. However, there must have been more to it than just this. Whatever the full context, after thirty days, despite the scare they had thrown into people as far south

as Thermopylae, the great horde receded home with not much more than wagon loads of plunder to show for their efforts. As part of the invasion and, true to their agreement with the Athenians, the Thracians had sent a large detachment to overrun the Chalcidice. The news of this host heading towards their homes sent shivers through even these hardy people. Resilient frontier folk they might be, and used to Thracians raids as a part of life, but this looked like something different. Yet when the Athenians didn't put in an appearance the intruders only spent eight days there before they faded back too, content to take what they could carry back with them.

Up to the year 328 BC the north, Macedonia, Thrace and the Chalcidice had been the cockpit, but after that date there is a real slowing down in our knowledge. The triumphs and tribulations of Macedonian kings and Thracian warlords are no longer the centre of attention. Little is known about what happened after Potidaea fell to Athenian arms. Tribute lists show that some communities who had ceased to pay up started to do so again in the twenties, but the problem is that the evidence is only suggestive. We cannot be truly sure who was back in the fold of the Delian League until the spotlight of history swings again to the Chalcidice. There is one incident, very briefly alluded to in 425 BC. It may be the iceberg tip of other activity that we are not privy to. This was an attack on a town called Eion by an Athenian officer, Simonides, who, after some initial success, was driven off by an armed Bottic and Chalcidian combination. However, this probably refers not to the port of Eion by Amphipolis but an unknown place in Thrace planted by people from Mende. Still it indicates that the Athenians continued to be militarily in play in the region. But it was small beer, and the process that fixes attention again on the resource-rich northern periphery starts with Brasidas leading his mixed bag of armed helots, slaves and grizzled Peloponnesian mercenaries out of the broad plains of Thessaly into the kingdom of Perdiccas.

## *Chapter Nine*

### **Winter War**

Winter warfare was not usual, yet certainly possible, between the martial polities that dotted the southern Balkans. This was not somewhere where the snows arrived at the end of autumn and did not melt until the arrival of spring. Mostly winters were reasonably mild, even in Macedonia, Chalcidice and Thrace, with just a very noticeable increase in precipitation. It was only in the three months of deep winter that the weather became sufficiently inclement to make it difficult for armies to function. For navies it was different, the threat of storms from September to May made mariners very nervous, but even for these people cramped in their light and brittle wooden barks it was possible if there was reason enough. There were other factors, like the need to get back for harvesting at the end of summer, and, as autumn came on, foraging became more problematic. But Brasidas was about to show that he could function at this time of year. His winter war would be fought in northern regions that would become increasingly familiar to him after his emergence from Thessaly in August 424 BC. He had set out within days of his Megaran success, indulging in a gambler's throw for the Spartan cause. It was not a desperate one. They had not risked so much, and it was one of the few options against an enemy camped out at Pylos and Cythera who were holding their comrades hostage in adamantine chains at Athens itself. It had also been of considerable significance that their intervention had been requested by King Perdiccas, who hoped to utilise the southerners' military chops against not only the Athenians, who were sponsoring family rivals against him, but a more local enemy too.

After the Vale of Tempe had been left behind, a face-to-face meeting between the king and the general can be assumed at the old capital of Aegae. Here, at the spiritual home of the dynasty that would conquer the world in 100-years time, there was much to discuss, particularly as Perdiccas had not yet officially broken with Athens and was at that moment more interested in a local quarrel with his Lyncestian neighbour Arrhabaeus, than with what the newcomers had in mind. So Brasidas, the heir of Cleombrotus, Leonidas and Pausanias stood in front of the king of Macedon who had called him north and was paying half of the Peloponnesian's wages. From amongst the throng of courtiers there were also many local Greeks and others who

had business with the Spartan general. It is probable that the Athenian League communities in Thrace and the Chalcidice, who were in open revolt, sent envoys to meet him. They had, after all, had somebody on hand when he passed through Thessaly. Others, waiting to see which way the wind was blowing, also made secret contact with the new arrival. The representatives from all these northern polities were only too happy when they found out that an officer of his reputation had now arrived on the spot. His personal qualities were going to be of considerable importance in encouraging those unhappy with Athenian control to turn to active opposition. The idea of a crusade for Greek freedom was more believable from Brasidas than most other Spartans just because he was more personable and approachable. It was possible to listen to him berating the Attic city for oppressing fellow Greeks without seeing behind his shoulder the myriads of helots he and his like had kept brutally subjected for centuries. He could appeal to self interest without it seeming that Spartan cooperation would come at a great price; a subtle call to arms for the city elites whose whole way of life was to juggle between the need for powerful friends and a wish to retain communal independence. However, some must have worried when it came time to pay the reckoning how much they might be expected to stump up in terms of specie, payment in kind or the mobilising their young men to fight for him.

Brasidas could carry a propaganda tune. This was clear from his arrival in the north, and the liberation myth could be powerful for people who wanted to believe it. Yet if it was mainly smoke and mirrors, then it was well worth it for Brasidas to get onside those who could provide bases for his armies and auxiliaries to act alongside his none-too-numerous warrior core. How much this really directed policy is difficult to say but the mood was useful, and though the stress on respect for the rights of the cities might be a polite formality it sat particularly well when contrasted to the brutal character of some of the Athenians' behaviour towards League members in the past few years. If Brasidas' reputation for bravery and ethical conduct made an impression all over the place, we still do not know the names of all the towns that immediately opened their gates to him. But some did, won over apparently by honeyed words or treachery.

For the Athenian *hegemon*, these developments amongst their northern tributaries were not easy to follow, particularly as they had only just become aware that the Macedonian monarch had decided to ditch his attachment to them. But once they realised that he had

joined their enemies they lost no time in declaring war against this man, who they blamed for bringing Brasidas into the region in the first place. With the threat becoming clearer, agents from Athens and any troops they could command were brought to high alert in the Chalcidice and Thrace to put a brake on what had begun to look like an epidemic of backsliding. However what seemed initially like an awful and immediate dismantling of her position in the north turned out not quite so bad because of Perdiccas' priorities. Brasidas' chance to reap the benefits of his arrival was put on hold as the king made clear his expectations. He was paying towards the upkeep of the newcomers, and expected something for his money. This turned out to be sorting out his troublesome Lyncestian cousins. There were old scores to be settled with the prince of that country, whose people might be blood Macedonians, but who had now clearly fallen out with the senior line sitting in Aegae.

Macedonian kings played off neighbours and rivals as a matter of course, making friends when it suited, and attacking on other occasions. But this entity on Perdiccas' western border was a particular concern. Increased holdings in potentially rich land of the Thracian border might be one thing, he could wriggle and finagle, build and bully there, yet it was influence in upper Macedonia that mattered more. It was the highland cantons with anarchist tendencies and different economic and political imperatives that always demanded attention. This was not just for themselves, but because it was through their glens and valleys that dangerous barbarians from the north might come down to take a thrash at the lowland realm. In the strike the king now contemplated Brasidas was scheduled to provide that solid core of infantry, the kind of good foot soldiers that would not be produced locally until the time of Phillip II. The combination of these solid men and Perdiccas' own levy was expected to provide a balanced force that should deal easily enough with the highland rival to the northwest. The whole would undoubtedly have been numerous, a sizeable army of invasion that kicked up dust on their approach to the high border country of upper Macedonia.

Arrhabaeus and his land of the lynx was the target in this border war, and the way to get at him lay through a steep pass near where the road west goes past Edessa today. Between the looming Bermion mountains to the south and Bora to the north, this route, with its dramatic waterfall, is on an age-old track followed in Roman times by the *Via Egnatia*. The town itself was not that developed. There was

certainly a habitation of some kind at such a strategic place, and the invaders would have taken advantage of its amenities to camp, before stiffening their sinews to advance into hostile country. It was not just that the people of Lyncestis would be unwelcoming but that the country was rugged and heavily wooded too, the sort of place where defenders with local knowledge could easily spring an ambush. This must have been a worry for Brasidas; the hoplite army he had led up from the south was not designed for assaulting steep and rocky outcrops or beating up through narrow glens and defiles. Certainly he had allies with him who had the *peltasts* for such work but still it must have been a concern. He would have been well aware that Demosthenes for Athens, and then Eurylochus for Sparta, had trouble in this kind of campaigning in Aetolia and Amphilochia just a few years before. The latter had even lost his life after his men had been waylaid by enemies hidden in a sunken bush-covered track. But there was more than just a worry about the terrain; what soon became clear was that there were real divisions amongst those involved in the enterprise.

Even before they reached the border, the Spartan began to evince far less enthusiasm than his paymaster would have hoped in this local spat. His had been a fairly spectacular gamble, bringing his army far north to a region where his people had been little involved historically. So the idea of their assets being squandered where Sparta's interests were not at all central was difficult; it was war against Athens that he wanted to prosecute with all his might and main. There was also another dimension. Brasidas and many of his Chalcidian friends not only had other priorities, they did not necessarily want the Macedonian king to be completely relieved of the Lyncestian threat to his western march. The presence of this enemy acted as an important discipline, and, without it, Perdiccas' enthusiasm for the anti-Athenian alliance might well wane. This was the background when the invasion army approached the enemy country, where hills rose dauntingly in front of them and the defile they would need to enter looked very difficult to pass if an enemy decided to contest it. As they neared, they worried what to expect from the defenders who had rallied to their ruler. The inevitable hiatus this caused allowed time for Brasidas to suggest to Perdiccas that talking might be a better way forward. He and Arrhabaeus, instead of fighting, might try arbitration as the way out of their internecine squabbles.

The Spartan general informed his ally that Arrhabaeus had already

sent across emissaries to express his accession to this arrangement. But the idea was not welcomed at all in the Macedonian camp where they expected the Peloponnesians to fight on their side, not make friends with their enemies. Brasidas though, against the express wishes of the king, not only continued his independent negotiations but went so far as to conclude a truce on his own behalf. Then, without consulting Perdiccas, he led his division away back down the route they had so shortly come up. This was rank desertion, and, hardly surprisingly, the king was incensed with this man whose services he had called north in the first place. This completely scuppered any plans for the invasion, but the king kept his cool, not wanting to burn all his bridges with these crucial auxiliaries. No one had an interest in openly falling out. Both sides needed each other even if each now regarded the other as not at all dependable. The kingdom that Perdiccas was trying to rule was a mettlesome steed, with internal and outside threats existing in abundance. The Thracian invasion of only five years before had shown that; the king needed allies and if the Athenians were determined to befriend his difficult siblings then he must at least retain tolerable relations with the Spartans. So, instead of breaking links and cutting off funds altogether, as he also turned home with his own forces, the king sent messages to his treasury staff to reduce his contribution to Brasidas' war chest from a half to a third of the whole.

So far, the northern adventure had not achieved a great deal; indeed the main result had been a considerable souring of relations between the Peloponnesians and their Macedonian sponsors, but now that was all to change. Even if his pockets were a bit lighter, Brasidas could now concentrate on what had really brought him to the region. As high summer moved towards its end, the Peloponnesians and their allies made plans to expand their zone of control into the Chalcidice. Swinging eastwards, the army left the camp of Perdiccas in central Macedonia to travel down a broad road past the waters of long snaking lakes that cut off the Chalcidice from Macedonia to the north. There were high mountains on both sides, but far off from the open fertile country they passed through where the Romans *Via Egnatia* and later the ubiquitous motorway of the modern world would follow. Long roads caused these hard-travelled veterans no distress. On arrival, and turning south, they followed the shore of the Gulf of Strymon where the Spartan commander learned from local informants that the vintage was ready. This was a circumstance he intended to use to put some pressure on the inhabitants of the important town of Acanthus. This place, named from the thorny acanthus bush that

abounded in the area, lay on the gulf coast, and sat at the very top of the Athos peninsula. Like so many cities thereabouts, precious metals and wood were key, and a good harbour had allowed the growth of a substantial wine export trade. The people here had done well out of Xerxes passing, being rewarded for the enthusiasm they showed in helping to dig a canal wide enough for two warships to pass abreast, through the narrow top of the peninsula cut at the outset of the 480 invasion. Their affluence is evidenced not only by the plenitude of coins that have been found nearby but also records that show them paying three talents in tribute to the Delian pot.

When the news of the invaders coming reached the town, the citizens were in two minds about what to make of their visitors. Partly it was the old class divide, with the popular party staying solid to the Athenian connection and their opponents eager for a change. The protagonists argued hard in the citizen body as to whether to let the intruder address the people directly and, though the popular party were against it, fear for their property, with these hard-looking men lurking outside, made the difference. Brasidas was let in through the gates and allowed to address the multitude. Once given the go ahead, he rolled out a very specific liberation agenda, about bringing freedom from Athenian oppression, and also brazenly expressed astonishment that they had not welcomed him and his men with open arms from the very start. But his main aim was reassurance, firstly that Sparta was not looking to substitute herself as an Imperial power and, secondly, that if Acanthus joined the Peloponnesian cause, and put their fate in the hands of a pro-Spartan leadership, he would not allow those put in power to vent faction bile against past supporters of the Athenians. He ended with a claim that the Spartan government at home had already sworn an oath to uphold the independence of anyone who joined their cause. In the event the people broke up to vote in secret.

Some counted the cost of rebellion while others saw the benefits of joining these strong men on the spot, but finally they agreed on detaching themselves from the Athenians. They did not let the newcomers inside the city walls until Brasidas gave personal security for the oaths binding his government to respect their independence. The impact the Spartan made with the people here was both memorable and typical, particularly for a member of a people not generally expected to show such people skills. Specifically, he is credited with great authority, being able to make sufficient guarantees



on behalf of the Spartan home governments to reassure the local people about their future prospects. This, as it turned out, was not the only benefit of Brasidas' glad handing at this time. Before the summer ended, ambassadors arrived from Stagira; they too were eager to sign up to the cause. Brasidas was making an impact that was noted by a man writing in Sicily several hundred years later:

'The city of the Acanthians was the first which he brought, partly through fear and partly through kindly and persuasive arguments, to revolt from the Athenians; and afterwards he induced many also of the other peoples of Thrace to join the alliance of the Lacedaemonians.'<sup>1</sup>

There was an insistent message now; the Spartans were here and there were plenty in more than one community that rubbed their hands in glee, and, with winter 424/423 BC arrived, Brasidas was angling to take full advantage of the inevitable relaxation of his enemy during this season. There was no thought here of step by step and slow progress. He saw an opportunity and intended to turn the northern world upside down. The core of the expeditionary force he led was made up of virtually professional soldiers. These were not citizen farmers eager to get under cover of their homes for the inclement season and even as a light snow began to fall his men responded when, from their base at Arne, he ordered them to pack up their goods, gird on their armour and prepare to march hard in the direction of Amphipolis. Outside factors made this particular moment propitious. News had come in from Boeotia about the battle of Delium, so now it must have been common knowledge that the Athenian army had received a real drubbing in the field. These big set-piece affairs were not so common in the Greek wars, so the impact of Hippocrates's defeat must have been concomitantly great. Secondly, the Odrysians were distracted, after fighting with other Thracians, from the north, called the Triballi, and having seen their king, Sitalces, cut down, and Seuthes his nephew replace him; a dynastic change around that was bound to make them at least temporarily less effective in fighting the Athenians' corner in the region. The campaign begun at Acanthus could be progressed with even greater confidence against an enemy whose standing had been badly dented both in morale and material terms by these events.

The army marched east across an inland road, leaving briefly any sight of the sea, always unnerving for these people. But the separation was short lived, as scouts at the front reported the salt scented coast of the Gulf of Strymon would soon be reached, and that supplies and

support were available, within striking distance of Amphipolis. Brasidas' target was of very real importance, not only because it controlled access to gold and timber in the Strymon basin but because of its position, covering the best crossing over that waterway which drains from the Lake of Cercinitis to the sea. It blocked the route east, the road to the Hellespont which if opened to her Peloponnesian enemies the Athenians feared would allow them to threaten the corn lanes that her people depended on to fill their bellies. To get past Amphipolis, without taking it first, meant a wide, tricky detour around the lake above the town through difficult mountainous country. And while that might be attempted by a strong force any such would find it very difficult to keep safe their line of communications without control of Amphipolis' walls.

With the Peloponnesian army came some of their allies, but mainly it was Brasidas' own veteran corps, which could move swiftly and with little paraphernalia at this treacherous time of the year. At dusk of the first day, they reached the communities of Aulon and Bromiscus, eating supper near where Lake Bolbe divided the Chalcidice peninsula from the north. They kept to the route the next day, even marching through the night, on tracks not yet made completely wretched by winter rain, intending to reach Amphipolis ahead of any word of their coming, in the hope of achieving surprise. So these tired and frozen warriors, who had only been able to eat some poor campaign fare while stopping briefly on the road, under cover of a snow storm managed to approach the west bank of the Strymon river. From there they could just make out the houses and walls of the city in the distant gloom. They had high hopes of certain people in the town who had already been contacted. Amphipolis was no Athenian home from home. The bulk of the population was made up of people from around about, come to make a living at this lively centre. Amongst these, it seems an expatriate community from Argilus was central to the plot to let in Brasidas' men. Argilus, an Andrian colony on the coast, was a matter of a few miles to the southwest, and the Athenians had been making threatening noises against the inhabitants that had got them annoyed enough to risk turning their coats. They had previously seen the Macedonian king as political protector, but now he was tied in with the Spartans it was part patriotism that drove them to turn fifth column both in their home town and in Amphipolis as well.

All had gone smoothly when the invaders reached Argilus itself.

They had been let in straight away and after that locals had been very useful in conducting the strangers on a dark and stormy night towards the bridge over the Strymon. In a country they did not themselves know at all, they had managed to make great strides, but now, approaching the main objective, whether things would continue on so well was much less clear. The walls of the town had not, by this time, been built down to include the bridge so it had to be separately guarded, particularly as between the river and the town defences there was a considerable suburb where many of the population lived. Coming as they did from the direction of Argilus suggests the bridge referred to was on the south side of the town where the Lion statue now stands. Indeed, though it is disputed, this must surely have been the case, as only in that place would there have been room for considerable expanse of suburban buildings. The bridge on the northern side that some propose as the one Brasidas took, though some of its foundations have been found, would have been too far close up to the walls of the town to allow any such urban development.<sup>2</sup>

Whichever structure it was, the number of sentinels on duty at the crossing was small, and they were not very vigilant on a stormy winter night, when they had every reason to expect any enemy would be seeking the kind of shelter they themselves were looking for. So, not anticipating trouble, and indeed having some bought men amongst them, they were quickly overcome. The passage over the bridge was cleared for Brasidas' onrushing warriors emerging out of the driving snow. Most of the residents outside the walls were caught still in bed and rounded up by the Spartans and their Thracian allies as they swept through the dark confusing alleys up to the town defences proper. Some people escaped the trawl, and made it inside, but the confusion with the enemy almost getting in after them was intense. Indeed this would have seemed the moment for Brasidas sympathisers in the city to have acted, but either they were in insufficient numbers or now the defenders were up and about and arming themselves. The assailants themselves were part responsible for throwing away the opportunity, by wasting time looting the habitations they had so easily occupied. The art of besieging was pretty much in its infancy in this part of the world; the Assyrians and their Persian successors might have been using towers, engines and mounds for centuries, but these Greeks had had little more in their armoury beyond a desperate assault by ladders or a blockade, when the attackers would settle down to build walls of circumvallation

around the city defences. This was often the extent of any attempt to take a defended city. Their speciality was surprise and subversion, and Brasidas had proven to be just the kind of man with subtlety and flair to give this a try. But his success had so far been partial and Eucles, the Athenian commander of the garrison, who had been sent to ensure against such an attack, was a sound man, and he had soldiers on the walls and at key points in double-quick time. All that the attackers could do now was set themselves up outside the walls, and take stock of the position this winter warfare had won them.

When he saw how many prisoners had been brought in, Brasidas recognised an opportunity. These people had plenty of friends and relatives inside the city, sufficient indeed to outnumber the small group of Athenians unequivocally determined on defending the place. The Spartans were under pressure of time. Brasidas had heard word that Eucles had sent for help to Thucydides, a general based at Thasos, and knew he must act quickly before any succour materialised to stiffen resistance. With this in mind, heralds were sent to propose surrender on exceptionally moderate terms. The arrangements proposed would allow anybody, Athenians or others, to leave the city unmolested with all their property that they could gather in five days. Those who decided to stay were assured of full citizen rights and independence within a framework of Spartan friendship. Eucles and the Athenians soon realised how isolated they had become amongst the inhabitants of this community they had hoped to defend. Fellow citizens who had welcomed them as support before now avoided their gaze and were clearly no longer impressed with the benefits of Athenian allegiance. In this situation they began to fear the residents might turn on them weapons in hand if they tried to force them to reject the terms offered. So with little real alternative, conditions of surrender were clarified and sworn too, even as Thucydides was hurrying to the rescue.

What we hear now is of this man arriving just in time to save Amphipolis' port of Eion from capture, but it must be remembered that what we get is from the stylus of the individual involved. It is possible that Thucydides really did press on to arrive and frustrate the Spartan general, to deny him a further triumph in a most dramatic manner. Yet if it had been the case then surely this would have been reported to the people in the Athenian Assembly by his returning soldiers. The question to be asked is why he did not get more of a sympathetic hearing, rather than a summary sentence of exile. All we

are learning is justification. There was definitely more behind the criticism of Thucydides than we get to know about. But if some stuff reads like an apology there are strong reasons to believe what followed. Brasidas had been within a night of taking the port but had to accept for the moment that he had been brought up short, particularly when the diehards who had decided to take advantage of his offer to leave Amphipolis arrived at Eion and joined up with their fellows determined to defend this last Athenian outpost at the mouth of the river. Not that Brasidas intended to leave them to an easy life there down by the seashore. The river was quite broad outside the town and he hoped to build some seaworthy boats there, to fight it out downstream. In fact, these new-built vessels were soon involved in a maritime spat as he moved to get control of the headland that commanded the port at the river mouth. But this aggressive stuff in cold winter waters was always going to be difficult and, when he sent his main force forward to make an attempt on the land walls of Eion, they made little progress as the defenders rained missiles down on them.

Despite this reverse, there was compensation for the attackers as they pulled back to Amphipolis. The frustrated Spartan received news that boded very well for his project in this part of the world. Envoys had arrived from the Edonian town of Myrcinus, up by Lake Cercinitis, offering fealty to the new power in the region, while Oesime, another colony planted by Thasos just down the coast to the east, also joined the cause. The death of the head of the Edonian royal family, at the hands of fratricidal sons and an unfaithful wife, had made any chance of protection from that quarter undependable so it made sense for these vulnerable folk to put themselves under the shelter of the new and powerful arrivals. So despite the setback at Eion, Brasidas had now established himself very satisfactorily in the key valley of the Strymon, a positive situation only made more so as King Perdiccas of Macedonia, apparently having forgiven the episode with Arrhabaeus, brought down his court and army to join his Peloponnesian friends. Behind the city's battlements, Brasidas awaited the arrival of old and new friends; all was pointing to the fact that he had really succeeding in winning hearts and minds since his arrival, though there was still plenty of work to do to bring over the various peoples in the Chalcidice and around, and show the power of Athens as a monolith with feet of clay.

Thus it was heartening, if not a great surprise, when a number of

Athens' Delian tributaries sent representatives asking the Spartans to come and liberate them too. To take advantage of these opportunities that were opening up, Brasidas felt the need for more dependable Peloponnesian troops so sent home for reinforcements. But while he paused to make these requests to the authorities on the banks of the Eurotas, his enemies acted. Despite the danger of winter sailing weather, the Athenians shipped out what soldiers they could gather straight away at the Piraeus, to garrison the key strategic places in the Chersonese and on the Thracian coast. The leadership at Athens had finally woken up to what a threat an active commander at the head of a Spartan Macedonian alliance could pose to their interests in that critical region. Brasidas himself was also far from finished for the year. He had from the beginning not so much meant to take over the government of all the Chalcidice as to make trouble for the Athenians and in a short time he had done a great deal of this. To cause distress for these people he was happy to exploit old political currents, pandering to the lasting ambitions of so many Greeks to be free of foreign governance. Whether he had any real political agenda himself is not clear, one suspects like most Spartans he felt more comfortable dealing with oligarchs, but the aim was to make friends rather than any concern about local political arrangements. The whole history of the man suggests he could get on with whoever he needed to achieve his aims, a facility that would see him eventually gain founder dues in a city planted by an Athenian. It would be a generation before another far-ranging Spartan, Lysander, received religious honours amounting almost to worship by Greeks in Asia. But the reputation Brasidas was gaining in the Chalcidice and western Thrace was a step on this road.

Now he geared up his Thracian and Macedonian allies to put aside their understandable inclination to enjoy recent triumphs in the warmth and protection offered by the amenities of Amphipolis. He was determined to do all he could to boost his own men's spirits, distributing paraphernalia that would not only keep them happy but increase their military efficiency as well:

'Also he had many complete suits of armour made, which he distributed among the young men who possessed no arms, and he gathered supplies of missiles and grain and everything else. And when all his preparations had been made, he set out from Amphipolis.'<sup>3</sup>

And so his contented warriors, with auxiliaries provided by allies, marched out into the winter landscape again and west across the Strymon Bridge, down the coast road towards the easternmost of the

three promontories that push south from the Chalcidice. The Athos peninsula is rocky and dangerous along its eastern length, with little in the way of harbours or beaches. So because the prevailing summer winds come from the northeast, when it blew into a storm any passing ships was likely to be pushed onto the rocks and destroyed. This is exactly what happened to Mardonius and his Persian fleet in the invasion of Greece in 492 BC. It is claimed he lost 300 ships in this disaster and, while this is probably an exaggeration, the numbers were significant enough that when, in 480 BC, Xerxes was planning to travel that way, he ordered the cutting of a canal through the neck of the peninsula. This made the journey not only considerably shorter but, most crucially, meant his own huge naval armament would not be risked in the voyage past Athos. This engineering marvel was still there as the Spartans and their allies pushed south into difficult and rugged country, where, now, isolated Orthodox monasteries stand guard over age-old traditions of gender bigotry.

In ancient times, hugging the coast of this beetling spine of hills, were a number of small towns. Sane, an Andrian colony was on the east side of the promontory just south of the canal while others further down on either flank where Thyssus, Cleone, Acrothoi, Olophyxus and Dium. These were small communities peopled by a mixture of Greek colonists, Thracians and indigenous Chalcidians. All except for Sane and Dium threw in their lot with the Peloponnesian newcomers. The standouts were not significant enough to warrant anything more than just ravaging their fields, orchards and olive groves. Brasidas, doubling back, had his eye on the promontory to the west, where, two thirds the way down, stood Torone, where it was known a considerable Athenian garrison was established. The road Brasidas and his men took was over tangled, high hills before falling down again to the blue sea of the coast and down along the west flank of the Sithonia peninsula. This leg had a backbone reaching to over 1,500 feet, dramatic country that boasted a beautiful coastline of fine white beaches on the west side. And, as Brasidas and his men marched along, their spirits were buoyed by the knowledge that their general had again been in contact with insiders at Torone, and all had high hopes its capture would be successfully concluded by means of a coup rather than the dangers of an escalade against a prepared defence, or a time-consuming siege. This would have presented even more than the normal logistical problems for a force that did not have command of the sea.

Torone was an affluent and important Chalcidian foundation of the eighth century named for the sea god Poseidon's daughter-in-law, as only appropriate for a port crucial to control for any power with maritime pretensions in the area. Sited at the bottom of a fine bay, the old town sat under its acropolis hill, itself below a higher eminence to the south. Assessed in the Delian league at twelve Attic talents a year, this was almost as crucial a place as Amphipolis, and had come into the Athenian fold after being liberated at the end of the Persian war. The defending garrison were well prepared after news of Brasidas' activities in the winter reached them, but the Spartan general still had an edge, having received agents from Torone in his camp. They had offered to sell the pass if he arrived with an impressive enough force, sufficient to overawe any citizens who still had faith in the Athenian cause. We are not told why they were so keen to have the Spartans in, but it was probably the old story of an oligarchic opposition impressed by the success Brasidas had been having and the favourable reputation he was winning. The journey from Athos had not been easy. It was over difficult paths traversing high hills, but at least they had guides who knew the country to lead them over paths the winter rains had not washed out. Indeed local knowledge was sufficiently good that it was arranged for the army to march the last stage through the night; this was becoming a pattern as they arrived outside the city walls in the morning murk before the rising of the winter sun. The intruders halted at a temple to the Dioscuri, almost half a mile east of town, while Brasidas called his officers together.

Hidden in the folds of this hilly country, the invaders, in the comfort of camp, finalised their plans with some more of the turncoats who had slipped over the walls in the dark to meet them. Beyond the temple, honouring the horse loving sons of Leda and brothers of the Trojan Helen, tracks led westward through dense foliage towards the city walls, country they knew they must traverse quietly to not arouse the defenders. A scheme was hatched for twenty men, armed with daggers, to make the approach, and be let into the walls as the initial step. Brasidas did not lead in person, and things did not go smoothly at first. The group as they approached the defences were suddenly spooked and refused to carry on. Eventually, seven agreed to continue, to follow Lysistratus of Olynthus, an officer still determined to make the attempt. These daredevils found their way in through the sea wall. This most likely came down from the acropolis in front of them, and connected to the port on their right. Once their confederates inside let them in, this forlorn hope showed exemplary bravery and



decisiveness. They were conducted straight up to the highest point of the acropolis, control of which would be crucial in dominating the town. There they found a small garrison who they swiftly dispatched, while still asleep, before opening a postern gate discovered in the west of the acropolis wall.

While this entry was in progress, Brasidas had been moving his main force closer, while still trying to ensure that they were not noticed by anybody in the sleeping town. Some 100 *peltasts* were dispatched ahead to secure a gate once it had been opened by the commandos already gone inside. These light infantry waited on the slope below the walls, eyes peeled for the lighted beacon that was to let them know when their comrades were ready. They worried about the time things were taking as they crept closer, but it turned out those inside had been very busy indeed. They had not only opened a postern into the walls surrounding the acropolis but they had also cut through the bar closing a gate that led directly into the agora. This meant that they could bring some of the *peltasts* outside in by the postern, and with their support, take control of the market place. Once there, they drove off anybody they found before signalling for the rest of the javelineers to enter through the market gate. When another beacon showed entry had been affected, Brasidas gave up any attempt to keep his men hidden. He led them in a rush, a war cry on every lip. They entered the town. They either filed through the gate they now controlled, or impatiently, scaled some handy scaffolding that had been left leaning up against the wall. Whichever route they took, their officers led them as quickly as possible uphill to secure the high ground that dominated the rest of the streets and buildings. By now, the citizens and defenders were up and about, but they were confused and had no plan as the fifth columnists, all now armed, had joined the intruders, and, together, had fallen on the Athenian hoplites of the garrison found sleeping in the marketplace. Of these many did not stand but ran for the fort on the Lecythus, a fortified promontory in the sea. Some even boarded two ships in the harbour that had brought them there, while those who could not escape tried to put up a front of shields and spears. But they could not last long and were killed fighting, though at least the time they bought allowed the pro Athenian inhabitants to organize and follow their protectors. Those able to do so retreated to join them in the Lecythus fort.

It was full day now, and light showed that the city was in Brasidas' hands. And to keep up the pace, he offered the defenders a way out

that he hoped would obviate the need to besiege them in their post. The locals were guaranteed their lives, liberty and property if they returned to their homes, and the Athenians were given assurances of safety if they too evacuated the fort. He got no response, all that could be agreed was an arrangement for the dead to be taken care of, and both sides settled down to digging in and beefing up the defences whether the walls of the fort or of the houses of the town facing them. But if his embassy failed to sway those who were burrowing in to resist, Brasidas did not let it affect his temper. He had an opportunity to get the rest of the people onside and he did not intend to waste it. Addressing a swift-called citizen assembly, this very un-laconic Spartan reassured them just as he had done at Acanthus. He assured the populace that he respected their political choices, even those who had cleaved to their Athenian friends and did not blame those who had opposed him. This reasonable man must have been a real surprise to those who had had dealings with his like before, and makes believable the reports about the reputation that Brasidas gained in his short time amongst the northern Greeks. This was all terrific balm for distraught inhabitants who were expecting the sack of their city to be imminent.

After the talking there was fighting. Brasidas launched his men against the parapets and houses that the Athenians had occupied to defend their advanced position in front of the fort. The garrison was at bay now, and for a day they threw down missiles from the roofs and parapets and stabbed desperately with spears and swords, as the assailants, shields held over their heads, tried to clamber up to get at them. The assaults went forward, spears and arrows rattling against upheld shields, but they were thrown back with casualties by the desperate garrison. After a number of these setbacks Brasidas realised the direct approach was not going to work. So on the next day he tried something different. Part of the defences the Athenians had thrown up were made of wood they had found lying about and against this Brasidas deployed a machine that we know was in common usage from a mention of it in the attack on the defeated Athenians after the battle of Delium. This was a primitive flame thrower made of a hollowed log, through which a bellow pushed air, over a cauldron of fire creating sufficient heat and flame to gut almost anything in front of it. To try and oppose this fiery attack, the defenders built a tower above a house in the defences from which to throw down both butts of water to try and douse the flames and stones to break the machine and kill its minders. Unfortunately the jerry built affair could not

sustain the weight of the heavy laden men climbing onto it. It toppled to the ground in a maelstrom of dust, noise and the flailing limbs of defenders. This seems to have been the last straw, and as the attackers moved forward to the sibilant sound of missiles in the air, the members of the garrison who could fled to their ships to get away. While some escaped to other Athenian-held places on the Pellene peninsula, the unfortunates who remained fell to the swords of the troops who overran the fort and who were not in a merciful mood after the trouble and casualties that had been caused by the bitter defence.

A visitor to Torone today clearly notices the acropolis and walls that have been found in the scrub on the top of what was the highest part of the town. Below the eminence, it is easy to imagine the seven desperadoes slipping over the walls by the sea, and with their friends inside allowing the rest of Brasidas' men to move through the gates between the acropolis and the main town. Drowned for many centuries, under the water off the coast, are the remains of the market place where the Athenian hoplites were eliminated and at the bottom of the lovely curve of bay is the Lecythus island with the atmospheric ruins of a Byzantine castle. But Brasidas had not come as a tourist. He wanted Torone, and he had got the job done. This place was a town on a hill, strongly positioned with a good wall protecting the port on the sea front, strongly held with a considerable Athenian garrison. Yet, like Amphipolis, Brasidas had again taken it by a surprise attack with very few casualties to his own side. This was far from usual, and says much for his enterprise and skill and that of the army he had brought with him from the Peloponnese. Still, even these men had their limits. What had been achieved was enough for one winter, and it is clear that the general felt he asked as much of his men as he could in this inclement season.

But when spring came, Brasidas may have wished he had pushed on, and not paused in his triumphant passage, because that season of 423 BC saw wider developments that would dramatically impact on his plans. This big picture however was not going to slow him down yet, Chalcidian affairs were still what mattered. So when agents from Scione crossed over the water to the Peloponnesians headquarters at Torone they found themselves welcomed with open arms. This latest putative convert was well situated on a two summited hill above the sea on the west side of the westernmost leg of Chalcidice. East of the modern village of Nea Skioni, there is a story that the colony had been

established when soldiers from the siege of Troy were driven off course when going home, but what most of the citizens thought about this foundation myth is not known, and the reality was that Achaean colonists settled the town about 700 BC. It had produced a couple of celebrities during the Xerxes war. One was called Hydna, who was credited with doing severe damage to the Persian fleet in 480 BC.<sup>4</sup> Pausanias tells us she was trained by her father as a diver and, when the fleet was threatened by storm off Mount Pelion, she and her father cut their moorings under water, causing damage sufficient to stop a devastating attack on the vulnerable Greeks' fleet. This earned the family combo a pair of statues at Delphi. When people from this community arrived with an offer to turn it over at Brasidas' headquarters he decided what was being proffered was well worth putting himself out for.

There is an instructive story of how Brasidas got himself to Scione to take up the offer. The problem was that the town was cut off by land because of Athenian control of Potidaea. This blocked the peninsula where it became very narrow as it joined the main body of the Chalcidice. The Spartan was very nervous about committing himself to open water, and took considerable precautions that were well remembered down the years. To travel, he took a small row boat with one trireme as escort, the logic being that if a small force tried to intercept him it would be seen off by the trireme. But if this vessel looked likely to be overwhelmed by a number of proper enemy warships he could slip away in the small skiff which the enemy hopefully would not even notice. This is considered a great bit of cunning by the likes of Polyaeus and Frontinus, but more than this it shows just what a dangerous element the water was to these enemies of Athens. This was a factor that was key to the strategic thinking of the Peloponnesians during the whole war, as they were seldom able to put to sea with confidence; even on an occasion like this when we do not know of any great Athenian fleet being in the region it still behoved them to be very careful.

Some of those in the town of Scione were not so keen on the turnaround against the Athenians, but they kept their heads down when the general arrived, feted and garlanded by those who had invited him in. Brasidas returned the welcome with acclaim for a people who, despite being cut off by the enemy at Potidaea, had not just waited to be liberated by others but had made efforts themselves. Nor was it just fond words; he was determined to retain the place as a

base for further efforts so established a small number of soldiers as a garrison to keep control. But then it looked like the rug was going to be pulled from under him as a single trireme pulled into the port of Scione and, off the gangplank, stepped two commissioners, with news of an agreement that had just been made between Sparta and Athens. One of these was the Athenian Aristonymus, and, for the Spartans, Athenaeus was with him, carrying details of this truce cooked up far away that looked set to impinge hard on Brasidas and his recent achievements. Athenian motivation in the pushing of the arrangement was largely about putting a brake on Spartan progress in the north, while those on the other side were desperate to get their Sphacteria prisoners back, and saw the arrangement as a step in that direction.

A rack of bigwigs had taken the requisite oaths to introduce a temporary break in the fighting, and the terms are known in some detail. After appropriately pious directives about Delphic usages and the sanctity of embassies, the core was around the status quo and that neither side would encourage desertion by the others' slaves. The concern about helot seepage was always paramount in Spartan thinking but the Athenians worried too, particularly when annual invasions had resulted in plenty of runaways taking advantage to escape the horrors of the Laurium mines. The timing of the cessation, though, was blurred, particularly over whether Scione had changed sides before or after it came into effect. Unsurprisingly, Brasidas argued long and hard that it had revolted well before. The argument itself soon moved to Athens after Aristonymus sent his report back home. The Assembly was in an uproar, and intent on an immediate military response that would have aborted the covenant with the ink hardly dry. But they then discovered envoys had been sent from Sparta, and that they were on the border hoping to keep the wobbly concord in place. These emissaries claimed that the assurances of Brasidas about the timing were genuine, and suggested that the newfound amity between enemies could be preserved if both sides agreed to put the case to arbitration. But this did not wash with the Athenians who saw what Scione had done as clean rebellion that they could not countenance if they were to retain their position in the region. By some fudging, which is not clear at all, an immediate formal breach between the two powers blocks was avoided.

Yet none of these attempts far away, to hold the line against a revival of the war, did much to slow Brasidas down on the ground, even though the particulars of the truce were now well known. After

Scione, the newcomer still had high ambitions on the Pellene and felt his prospects were still good on this peninsular drive. The next target he had in mind was Mende. This place on the indented peninsula was in tree-covered country, and difficult to access. Resource rich, the people had been able to construct the amenities typical of great Greek polities, amidst the hills and along the coast, with temples to the gods the appeasement of whose tempers was considered to be decisive in the life of man. This town, named from mint plants common around about, was another colony, this time begun in the eighth century by displaced Eretrians and like others in this region it had prospered from its proximity to timber and precious metals. Since being brought into the Delian League, with annual tribute assessed from between six to fifteen Attic talents, it had been restive enough, and now the tension between the *hegemon* and member showed again. The pro-Spartan element, seeing how Brasidas had done so well for the people who brought him into Scione, decided they too could get their way domestically by siding with the power on the spot. These wealthier men were not that numerous but still managed to let the Peloponnesians into the town, meaning that during what was supposed to be a truce another Delian backslider had been brought over to the Spartan side. Brasidas must have known he was in the wrong but didn't care. If there could have been an argument over the sequence of events at Scione then there could not about Mende, though he tried to justify his actions by claiming some Athenian infringement of the terms of the truce. The Spartan general was prepared to use the most transparent excuse to maintain the momentum of his Chalcidian project.

But for these new friends of Sparta there was a downside to getting out from under Athenian control. Liberation could be a dubious benefit when it brought with it demands that blood be shed for what looked like just Spartan benefit, yet at this stage the promise still seemed to have its attractions. Brasidas, when he found himself outside the walls of Scione and Mende, did not find himself turned away unwanted. Partly no doubt it was the good name he had earned personally. Anybody who would curtail the vengeful inclinations of the new men put in the stead of the pro-Athenian administration was bound to gain kudos all round for ensuring a minimum loss of innocent lives. News spread of this Spartan's reputation and if not everything is believed, the suspicion remains that his reputation was buffed up to point out the lesser qualities of so many of his compatriots, still this articulate, believable and charismatic Spartan

definitely had a personal impact . But the turncoat cities knew it was a risk that their actions were bound to stir up the Athenians in a very significant way. They knew that soon they might expect the arrival of an expeditionary force to try to reverse what had occurred, and one strong enough they might find it very difficult to defend themselves. And this was a danger that their new friends were not in a strong position to alleviate. They could not leave many troops to offer protection; a Spartan officer and a few men might stay behind to give some backbone to resistance but the army could not be too frequently diluted by the packaging up of squads to stay and fight for all the places that had come over.

Yet despite the cold sweat of fear the insurgent leadership must have felt, for some of the inhabitants there was good news. In this time of grave danger they found they had friends who were prepared to help and offer safe haven. Brasidas, once informed of the widespread fears of Athenian retaliation, made arrangements for the women and children from both Scione and Mende to transplant. It was agreed that they and any other of the non-combatants should move to Olynthus leaving 500 Peloponnesian hoplites and 300 Chalcedonian *peltasts* under Polydamidas to lead the local men in defence. It was a wrench leaving their homes with only the possessions they could carry on carts and the backs of pack animals, and knowing their homes might be destroyed to deny their use to the enemy was anguish. Also the god-fearing worried about deserting temples where the deities would look in vain for their due and perhaps withdraw their favour from the people who were stripping them of deposited valuables, even if it was to keep them out of enemy hands. We don't know the names of these refugees, either ordinary citizens or communal leaders of the exodus, but we must admire the dedication; it would have been much easier to kowtow to the returning power of Athens, to lose a portion of their freedom and keep the comforts of home. The noise of crying children and wailing women would have been heard on the roads leading to the transports, a picture of misery replayed down the ages but on this occasion at least the distance was not great and once journey's end was reached they could be fairly confident of being out of range of immediate retribution. Also, there was plenty of good farm land around Olynthus, and the locals welcomed them, helping to collect the wood, bricks and stone required to make new homes for the incomers.

There is confusion on the exact belligerent status of Sparta and

Athens around April 423 BC. But whatever the official position, Brasidas had showed he had no intention of indulging in half measures. He was still determined to continue to defend and, if possible, expand what he had won in Chalcidice and Thrace. Unfortunately, he almost immediately found his capacity to be compromised by an old problem. Perdiccas had, once again, become involved in a recurring local dispute, and needed the services of the man whose troops he was still part funding. The king was pretty unsympathetic to the Spartans' priorities, and demanded that his friends from the south stop faffing about on the Pellene peninsula, and concentrate on the first job in hand, the eradication of his Lyncestian rival. We don't know if Brasidas resisted the call, but, almost certainly, the threat to cut off his monies would have pulled him into line and ensured Perdiccas was able to get his way, however much the Spartan furrowed his brow at this distraction. That king had his home-raised army, good cavalry and hoplites from Greek communities in Macedonia, with Chalcidian and Acanthine auxiliaries as well, but it was only when backed by the Peloponnesians did he feel able to proceed with confidence against the hostile cousin over the border. Once the Peloponnesian army had reached Macedonia again, the combined force numbered 3,000 hoplites, and if these and the Macedonian blue blood horse were the cutting edge there were plenty of others too. Chalcidian warriors had come to the number of 1,000, who as they are not mentioned amongst the hoplites were, presumably, some sorts of *peltasts*, and there was also what is described as 'an immense crowd of barbarians'.

The whole assembled horde marched off on the road west in a mood of high self-confidence. They probably took the same road they had in the previous campaign, that goes by Edessa into the hill country beyond and eventually wends down to what was at that time a lake, but is now a drained and fertile basin. The heavy horse of the Macedonian aristocratic class would have led the way, with lighter armed retainers acting as the scouts for the whole array. Brasidas' men and the rest of the heavy foot would have been in the centre, while the *peltasts* kept pace, guarding the wings and the baggage that came on behind, both for protection and because to march behind it would mean pushing through an unbearable world of kicked-up dust. The Lyncestians were not found immediately, but it did not mean they were not there. Their king on hearing news of Perdiccas' arrival had wasted no time in gathering his people who had not, since the last intrusion, in the least forsaken their desire for independence. We do



not know anything of his council but there seems to have been no thought of retreat or some kind of scorched earth policy. The idea of a withdrawal into the wild interior of mountains and lakes might have looked the safer possibility, but bravery was anyway the required default position of these kinglets and any suggestion other than of an immediate face off might undermine an always fragile credibility. Even if the Macedonian king was the senior monarch with greater military resources, it was not such an imbalance that the Lyncestian could not risk the lottery of combat. These contests between Macedonian cousins had not been uncommon in the past, and the pattern of response was pretty set, and by no means always ended in defeat for the junior branch.

So while they had held back, defending deeper in their territory, it was not in an attempt to avoid battle, and they were not so far away that the outriders from the invading force scouring the hills did not eventually find them massing unseen, but prepared to move forward and face the invader. King Arrhabaeus was with his whole levy mobilised and encamped on high ground. The army the Lyncestians deployed would have been very similar to that the Macedonians fielded as essentially the same people who would under Philip II, in less than a century, coalesce into the greater Macedonia. They probably had only a few hoplites in their ranks but plenty of the aristocratic cavalry and light, *peltast*-type, infantry that people who lived in their kind of hilly country produced in abundance. They had come in strength in defence of hearth and home to confront a mass of invaders who, on encountering resistance, sited themselves on high ground opposite them.

There was a large alluvial plain between the two encampments and the gung ho cavaliers on both sides could not resist testing their mettle against one another, while their generals and footslogging comrades eyeballed each other. The Macedonian troopers who moved forward to fight were sustained by the fertile fields of their owners' estates, and, as more country had come into the control of the Macedonian state, their numbers had increased proportionately. All of them showed the fine accoutrements expected of well heeled men of high status. For defence, body armour and open-faced helmets and for offence there was a stabbing spear, perhaps a javelin to throw and a cutting sword for use in extremis. Open-toed boots and a flowing cloak completed their clothing. Their horses lacked the Arab bloodlines that give catwalk elegance to many modern breeds but

influences from Scythia made them hardy if not bulky. If sustained by the kind of good summer grassing available in Macedonia they could carry their riders for many long hours. Without stirrups and saddles, control came from the pressure of thighs and knees, with balance helped by holding the mane. Still they were real lancers, using shock tactics and able to deliver a hammer blow. They had reins and bridles to guide their mounts and though the evidence is for a couple of generations later they may have already employed a wedge formation with an officer at the head of the unit as reference for manoeuvre. Though they were tough fighters they were not necessarily amenable to discipline. They liked to fight war on their own terms, with plenty of servants and amenities of life carried on baggage wagons that might slow any army down. Loyalty was strong, with the best of them being the king's friends, basking in the glory and munificence of their sovereign and prepared to spill blood for the privilege. Despite the increase of money available to Perdiccas, regular payment that was always bound to be the foundation of a really malleable fighting force was not yet the norm.

Plume-shadowed riders descended the slopes on each side, prancing and caracoling to show their proficiency on the horses that both established their status and gave them advantage on the field of battle. The Lyncestian command seemed the more aggressive of the two. After a time they began to start feeding their infantry down the rolling brushwood slope into the cavalry combat swirling on the plain below. This gauntlet thrown down was eagerly picked it up by both the Macedonians and Brasidas as well. He was a different man from the man who had opted for arbitration when he had previously encountered this enemy. The auguries were taken, the heavy infantry armed themselves and coming from their separate camps deployed each into their own phalanxes. Then they moved with trumpets blaring and paeans sung, down the hillside to face the enemy, the horsemen now withdrawing away to the flanks to allow room for infantry armies to face each other in preparation for the key clash. Brasidas almost certainly held the right of the line at the head of his helot spearmen and Peloponnesian mercenaries, while the Macedonian king would have stayed mounted with his cavalry guard. He would have wanted to observe the infantry confrontation, no doubt looking for an opening to intervene and bring victory or to pursue a beaten foe. The two sides came forward in undulating lines eight to twelve deep with the officers and men, from generals down, hefting their *hoplon* shields on to their left shoulders, and sweating

hands grasping their sturdy spears. In fact, soon after the combatants experienced the racket of battle, it was over, and, instead of grimly holding the line, the Lyncestians pulled back dribbling casualties up the hill to get to the safety of their camp. Heavy fatalities are claimed against the defending army, enough for the confederates to build a trophy and claim victory, but what happened next does not suggest the encounter had been decisive.

It looked like the confederates had balanced their use of different troop types nicely; there had been no nasty surprises sprung by troops hidden in hostile terrain, and the quality of the Peloponnesian and other hoplites exhibiting an orthodox and inexorable front had shown to good effect. But now another participant entered the picture. To take on the Arrhabaeus, Perdiccas had not just depended on his invading army. He had also hired some of those very Illyrians who so often used to enter lowland Macedonia in punishing raids. There was a hiatus now while the invaders anticipated the arrival of these mercenaries who had solemnly promised Perdiccas to join in this thrash against a people they anyway generally considered blood enemies. But after three days they had not shown, and Brasidas again began to exhibit the kind of lack of aggressive drive that had upset the Macedonians' king so much on the last occasion. Perhaps the fact that his arm had been twisted to join the war in the first place is relevant. It should be no surprise that tension persisted between the Spartan general and the Macedonian monarch. The latter wanted, once his new allies arrived, to press on and wreck any Lyncestian communities and countryside within range, while Brasidas still worried about the hay the Athenians might be making around Mende and the rest of the Pellene while he was away upcountry.

This lack of confidence seemed to receive some justification with the non arrival of the Illyrians whose expected contribution the Macedonians had made so much of in the confederate councils. While this was causing bad blood around the Spartan public tent and the court quarters of the king news arrived that showed matters were considerably worse than just some delay in these auxiliaries turning up. The expected Illyrians were not coming at all. Indeed they had not only torn up their employment contract with Perdiccas but had agreed instead to join forces with Arrhabaeus. This news when it arrived was deeply worrying to all concerned, they had hardly crushed the opposition in the last encounter and now the enemy were about to be strongly reinforced by the very people the invaders had counted on to

give them the edge. Everybody knew what a fearsome crew these Illyrians could be, not perhaps steady but wild and dangerous and particularly intimidating to the local soldiers whose communities had too often suffered from their raids in the past.

This double-dealing people were well known. They had been encountered as Greek settlers pushed up the Adriatic, dropping off colonies at places like Apollonia, Epidamnus and on the islands further north. Herodotus talks about their odd coupling habits and a *periplous*<sup>5</sup> mentions some tribal names but this was pretty much the first time the undertakings of Illyrian peoples are mentioned in Greek writing. And they emerge as warlike and dangerous, using enemy skulls as drinking vessels, and slaughtering their own people if there was a risk of them being captured. After this particular eruption they would remain staple enemies of a Macedonia which was emerging into greatness and the Romans as well, as they came to dominate the Balkans. Most were light infantry, like Thracian *peltasts*, with a few cavalry and armoured infantry as support; clean-shaven warriors, characteristically armed with a single-bladed chopping sword. One small and one heavy spear were commonly carried, and helmets and greaves found in warrior burials suggest these were in use by the elite. It was with their arrival that things really began to go wrong for the invaders. At the conference table, it turned to being all caution where before it had been aggression, as the confederates agreed that, as they had not gone too far into enemy country, they should cut their losses and pull back out altogether.

The two armies, the Macedonians, their auxiliaries and the Peloponnesians, being camped a little way from each other, needed to be coordinated to ensure the retreating column was well protected when they marched away. But since the debacle of the last invasion rifts within Macedonian-Spartan relations had not really been resolved. Behind the facade of unity in the command tent, there was a toxic cocktail of conflicting interests and bruising personalities. So perhaps it is not a complete surprise that, at daybreak, while Brasidas and his officers dressed their lines for the road, it turned out this expected coordination was not what happened at all. Word came that their allies had already decamped in complete disorder. They had convinced themselves that the enemy and their Illyrian friends now outnumbered them so significantly that they would stand no chance in an open fight, so it was in a panic that they took their decisions. Though it is described as an eventuality that even great armies could

be liable to this kind of alarm, the suspicion remains there was more behind it. That Perdikkas' men ran as fast as their feet would take them was not just because of fear of a horde of bogymen pictured brewing mayhem in tandem with the Lyncestians, but was actually intended to hang his allies out to dry. Division and distrust had been there from the start, and that the Macedonians, Peloponnesians and others failed to coordinate is perhaps not a shock. However, the pusillanimous behaviour of his allies, and the terror factor these Illyrians brought, had meant that Brasidas knew his men's morale would be hit.

The Peloponnesians now found themselves on their own, isolated and vulnerable in enemy country. They could see lines of Illyrian spearmen, and squadrons of Lyncestian horsemen massing to come down on them. If it was not to prove impossible for them to escape then it was imperative to keep open the corridor back home. They needed to secure a route to safety beyond the mountains. Being greatly outnumbered was a reality now, even if it had been something of a chimera when Perdikkas and Brasidas were still together. He needed to act quickly if they were not to be surrounded and ensnared in camp with no hope of relief. To get out, but to do so without exposing his army to defeat and disaster was going to be a very difficult trick to pull off. The only consolation in this testing situation was that the warriors, whose skills the Spartan general had been honing for some years, had shown their worth plenty of times before. Now the heavy infantry were drawn up in a kind of square, with these shield bearers showing a barrier against both the missile and melee attacks that were expected all round as they slowly moved out on the road home. But it was not just a defensive posture, light troops were kept in the centre of the formation, as were the younger most agile hoplites in position to rush out and attack if an opportunity arose. The intention was they might, from behind the moving wall of shields, emerge at the run. Then they could drive off any Illyrians who ventured too near the caravan, ensuring pain would not be all on one side in this passage out of Lyncestis. What is notable here is that these helot hoplites who made up the most of the core of Brasidas' force were, like true Spartiates, organized into age groups. They obviously had not experienced the *agoge* or life in fraternal messes, but apart from this they were organized for battle just like the masters of war themselves. Beyond this well-managed deployment on the march, Brasidas also kept 300 of his best warriors around him, as a rearguard prepared to face whatever the enemy might throw at them in the

course of the pursuit.

The fickle behaviour of their allies meant it was essential that Brasidas put some steel into followers trapped and embattled in enemy country. Before the men marched off, his words of encouragement are reported. It was the familiar trope. The general buoyed up those who could hear him with a picture of the enemy as barbarians, who, while looking dangerous, lacked steadiness. They might come on like wild things to begin with but if faced with a firm, ordered front they would soon give up. We hear of this sort of thing all the time but on this occasion it would turn out what was said had much in it. He had deployed in a defensive posture, and the way the men carried on suggests such a square formation was far from completely unknown to them. We certainly hear of armies of hoplites in this era trying a similar tactic. Whether it is the remnant of the 10,000 stumbling home from Mesopotamia after the battle of Cunaxa in 401 BC and using this porcupine formation against not only regular Achaemenid regiments but against hoards of Carduchians or Armenians as well; or the Spartan king, Agesilaus, beating off Persian attention around Sardis or the best of Thessalian cavalry near Pharsalus when he returned from fighting in Asia to Greece in 394 BC to face an anti-Spartan coalition built in his absence. The hard crust of the square that presented to its tormentors would have been made up of the best-armed men, showing the wide *hoplon* shield that was the key to survival against the stones, arrows and javelins that their enemies would fire at them. Some would have had greaves and even body armour and helmets as well, but not many. The helot recruits would not have had the wherewithal to arm themselves that well, although some may have picked up pieces of equipment when they captured towns and stripped enemy dead. And, anyway, whatever the opportunity to acquire defensive gear, the trend over the century had been to a reduction in heavy body armour on campaign.

Brasidas paced the inside of his marching square, making sure the men kept their alignment as well as possible. He would have been well accoutred but not flashy. These Spartans were not unconcerned about their appearance, after all they famously combed their long locks before battle, but they did not go in for garish display. As a general he undoubtedly sported greaves but they would have been plain and his shield carried by his body servant was not encrusted with gilded scenes from mythology, just the plain upside-down V or Lambda. His body armour would have been the thorax made from

linen and glue, perhaps reinforced with some metal plates. Heavy bronze affairs had gone out centuries before, though would come back later, and the visual evidence we have for the fifth century generally shows this lighter more flexible design. With him in the square were the non combatants who acted as both servants to the soldiers and occasional light infantry. Not the seven per warrior that were reported at the battle of Plataea in 479 BC, after all these were helots themselves without the means to afford such back up. Some such unarmed helpers may have come from their own servile villages to do the work of cooking and herding the transport animals, but they would have been few. The Spartan state had no interest in thousands or even hundreds more of their key manpower being taken from the land. During campaigning slaves might have been purchased with booty or even directly captured from the enemy but it is still not likely their numbers were great. So it was a pretty slim and agile force that Brasidas led in a prickly square through the rough hills leading to the Macedonian border.

Whatever the outer ranks wore, they all showed a steady shield wall to their swarming attackers and, after some time trying to penetrate this defence, the pursuers decided their barbed prey was just too tough to tangle with. And while a considerable force was left to stalk behind and harass the Peloponnesian caravan with occasional attacks, the great majority of the Illyrians pulled away looking for easier pickings. They found them in the remnants of the Macedonian army who had kept no order at all as they tried to get home as fast as their feet or horses would carry them. Those who had fallen behind were picked off, and, apart from these stragglers, the main body proved vulnerable too, as it made its way down the road out of Arrhabaeus' country. So these bodies of men in different states of order and with different intention were pressing in the same direction to get to the pass that led to the lowlands of Macedonia. Perdiccas and his followers were being chopped and chased by the Lyncestians and their Illyrian auxiliaries, while Brasidas' army was accompanied by more circumspect foes. All were heading towards the gap that promised safety for one side but loss of a much-valued prey for the other.

The Lyncestians and Illyrians were well aware that the Peloponnesians would be completely lost if this route was closed to them. Not knowing the country they would never find another road out. They were therefore intent on arriving first, in numbers. But

Brasidas was equally cognisant of how matters stood, and recognised he must secure the uneven trail rising in front of him. He ordered his 300 picked men to rush on ahead and dislodge the Illyrians who could be seen milling on the hill that dominated the pass. And, once there, to keep off the others who were occupied mopping up the Macedonians or had been following the Peloponnesian square. The 300 erupted amongst those Illyrians who had gained the hill but not put themselves in any sort of defensive posture. Shields forward and spears jabbing with savage cries they herded the lightly-armed enemy off the height hoping this would allow the rest of their comrades to push along the road the eminence commanded. While they held the slope the road was open for the rest, who yelled war cries to keep up their spirits as they pressed on. They were still under pressure, and Brasidas' trusted men held the rear of the column against an enemy pressing on their heels. It was more than freedom that was at stake, for they had heard that the Illyrians were reputed to indulge in human sacrifice. It was this realisation and their discipline that kept them firm. This it turned out was the final round, the rest of the Illyrians had been dismayed by the sight of their men running routed down the hill and now also could see that having reached the top of the pass their quarry were well on the way to safety. It had been nice work by Brasidas; an intelligently-executed withdrawal, with few casualties at all, he had extracted his army from an awful predicament that they had been dropped in by people who were meant to be their friends and allies. There is no more pursuit recorded, although it is likely that the thousands of Illyrians ranged on the border made life uncomfortable for any Macedonians they found nearby unhidden or unprotected. Some must have been slaughtered or taken for slaves, and property snatched or destroyed before the raiders withdrew northeast to their homelands.

The trap had almost been sprung, but the 300 had kept the jaws from closing, and Brasidas breathed a sigh of relief as he allowed his men to slow their pace, and continue the march out of the dangerous country. Still, by the end of the day's tramp they had managed to get to Arnisa, a city well within the borders of Perdiccas' lands. But if the locals here were theoretically friends and allies this was not matched by the mood of the Peloponnesians. They deeply resented the desertion of the Macedonian king and his army and took out their feelings on anything that came their way. This included both the large amount of baggage the Macedonian army had dropped on the road in their night retreat, and local oxen they found in the fields. If this was



understandable considering what they had been through, it was not going to be good for their relationship with Perdiccas, and this might affect Brasidas' long-term chances for success in the north. It is claimed it was this behaviour that pushed their inadequate allies even further into the direction of the Athenian whose agents had been making great efforts to get the Macedonians back onto their side.

What Perdiccas had been about in this aborted invasion is a real mystery. It might be possible he lead the Peloponnesians into a trap as pay back for them letting him down in the previous war, or was it just a fine example of the old saw about not putting faith in princes. To the king his auxiliaries from the south were anyway expendable, and, once it was clear they intended to follow their own agenda just as much as his own, resentment rose. So, even if not malevolent of intent from the beginning, once the situation in Lyncestis became tricky, he was not going to worry overmuch about them. What time of year this all took place we don't exactly know but it could have taken most of the summer and perhaps longer. Brasidas must have feared what the Athenians had been up to in the time he had been away. He knew he could not presume on long lasting loyalty in the Chalcidian places that had joined up, when the strong arms of his own expeditionary force was out of the picture. He was very aware of the need to waste as little time as possible in returning, if his achievements of the previous winter were not to be jeopardised. So it was all speed as orders were given to get back to Torone and, indeed, once there, he found much had happened in his absence. Earlier in the year, when he may have acted in contravention of the truce made by his own government, the towns on the Pellene peninsula had welcomed the Spartan general with open arms. But when their protector had departed they soon realised how harsh the consequence might be. The leaders and the people had no real idea when or indeed if he would return. Plenty of Spartans had died in battle before, and plenty of armies come to grief fighting in the western hills against barbarian tribes. There were fears that might have had many talking about them having backed the wrong side, that it might be politic to try and reverse the decision recently taken to espouse the cause of Sparta. The old certainties of an Athenian allegiance no longer looked quite so awful in many of the rebellious communities.

Brasidas treated the possibility of a crumbling of the pro-Spartan alliance with the seriousness it deserved. To let the Athenians claw back any control would give a bad signal to all the other places in

Chalcidice and Thrace who, presently, he hoped to recruit as friends. But it was not just the possibility of backsliding, enemy activity showed that he had much more to concern him immediately, particularly as Perdiccas was looking like changing from an ally and paymaster to an outright enemy. Since he had left not only had Mende been recaptured but Scione was under investment by an Athenian army. The Spartan had been right to worry when the Macedonians involved him in the mess of a Lyncestian campaign, as the Athenians had swooped soon after when Cleon convinced the Assembly of the need to make an example by retaking Scione and putting the people to the sword. They had needed little persuasion.

Nicias, who had handed his Pylos command to Cleon two years before, and Nicostratus had been given the mission of re-conquest, and were outfitted with a large fleet of forty Athenian ships, ten more from Chios, 1,000 Athenian hoplites, 600 archers, 100 Thracian mercenaries and a number of *peltasts* provided by locals who had joined up with them at Potidaea. From that solid base, peopled now by Athenian colonists, this considerable armada found itself well positioned right on the neck of the peninsula and able to stop any overland support going to either Mende or Scione, situated as they were further down the leg. The Athenian leadership had little doubt of their ultimate victory and as Mende was nearest it was scheduled to suffer first as the Athenian craft slid out of port and hugged the coast for fifteen or so miles. But if the men in the first target had been cut off from support from the north it was not so from their sister city Scione a little south on the same peninsula. That place had sent not only 300 of their own men but also the Peloponnesians who had been garrisoning the place under a man called Polydamidas. This general, with the local defenders and the men he brought with him, was able to field 700 hoplites, and with these he encamped strongly on a nearby hill. This strongpoint dominated access to the town that was situated on other rising ground behind and below it. The defenders intended that they should not be shut up and captured if they could avoid it.

After the attackers arrived within sight of their target, they landed north of the town. Here, just where a sandbar goes out into the sea in a point, there are extant ruins of a temple to Poseidon, deserted and atmospheric on the dunes above the grey pebble and white sand beach. There, Nicias and Nicostratus beached their ships along the curve of the bay, the seamen dragging their charges out of the water.

Relieved at least their landing had not been opposed the generals ordered their men unloaded, ready to push on and attack the town. But rising out of the farmers' fields and fruit groves as they marched down the coast was the steep rugged ground that the enemy had prepared as a defensive position. It was in the direct path of anybody coming against the town and the steepness of the approach that can be appreciated even today makes quite understandable what happened next. Nicias marched straight forward in an assault on the hilltop camp. With sixty of the best Athenian hoplites, all of the archers and 120 light infantry from Methone, from over on the other side of the Thermaic gulf, they attacked along the path that led up the hill. The commander, belying his nearly sixty years led from the front as the men surged forward and suffered for it. The fighting was desperate and difficult and he was wounded while the assault faltered when his followers saw their general was hurt. But his was only an advance guard and Nicostratus was coming on behind with the rest of the army. These tried a different route of ascent but they had not scouted properly. It was very difficult ground, and just the climb put the men into disarray, never mind when the defenders set upon them. Disordered and assailed, they ran for it, and, indeed, only by doing so did they avoid a real slaughter. Both sets of attackers ended back at the bottom of the hill, in a very shaken condition, happy enough to find safety behind the works of their defended camp, while the victors, at dusk, returned to Mende. They were confident, now, that the enemy would find it extremely tricky to surround and entrap them.

The Athenian generals had been given a bloody nose, and any further ventures from the north of the town seemed impossible, but on the south side things were different. There, suburbs outside the walls spread down to the water where the approaches were quite practical to those with command of the sea. The attackers were still determined and, reckoning most of the enemy were looking north, they shipped the army as quickly as they could down the coast to come at the defenders from the other side of the place. The Athenian ships again beached on broad sand and pebble strands, unloaded the soldiery in double quick time to take over the habitations south of the acropolis and beyond the city fortifications. The resistance at the hill had been a triumph for the defenders but Athenian mobility meant they could detour past what they could not suppress. Things outside Mende now began to look like they would settle into the usual grim routine as Nicostratus with half the army stopped up the road through Potidaea

gate in the northern wall while Nicias took the rest south into the countryside as far as the frontier with Scione to destroy anything they could find in the country around. From their new base in the suburbs the coast curved down to Scione and soon black smoke was seen curling up from fired farmsteads, vineyards and orchards as the *peltasts* and horsemen in their hundreds got into an incendiary groove. This was heavyweight wrecking of the kind these Athenians had seen so often happening to their own country, but while the Peloponnesians in Attica had failed to undermine local resolve by this activity, here it had an immediate impact.

For three days the able-bodied citizens, who had remained behind when their families decamped, watched their property being despoiled, before the local leadership and its Peloponnesian backers under Polydamidas called out the levy to arm themselves with the weapons piled nearby, so as to make a sortie against the besiegers. But the Spartans' position had weakened despite the earlier success. Firstly the 300 warriors from Scione had gone back home when they heard of party strife breaking out in their own city. Also the pro-Spartan party amongst the people had always been quite small at Mende, and now it became clear that many locals were not at all keen to fight for the Peloponnesian cause. This simmering opposition was only made worse when the Spartan general personally assaulted a popular-party man who articulated the desire to befriend rather than fight the Athenians. This hard line response, with plenty of spears, shields and swords piled in heaps nearby, turned out to be not wise at all. The opposition's spokesman had ample support, and his friends, milling around, picked up the weapons provided, not to make a sortie but to use them against the incumbent administration and their Peloponnesian auxiliaries. Polydamidas and his friends found themselves under attack from a quarter they did not expect. Any resolve they might have had was swiftly shattered when word passed about that the revolutionaries had coordinated plans to let the besiegers in as well.

Shaken and attacked, many were cut down, while the rest fled up the hill to the citadel which the Peloponnesians had secured from the beginning. It was a steep climb to the top of the town but once they got there they were pretty secure and able to overlook the activity all around them. Happy insurgents now did open a gate to let the Athenians in and the defence was over, but what happened next suggests this was not something that had been planned from the

beginning. The Athenian troops once inside began sacking the town, as if they had taken the place by assault. No one's property was safe, everything not nailed down was taken and what they could not carry away was destroyed. It almost looked like Mende would end as a charred and blackened ruin bearing witness to the class vitriol amongst its inhabitants, until hard work by the Athenian commanders stopped the takeover turning into a full-scale massacre. Getting a reputation for murdering the locals, particularly those who had come over to their side, was not going to improve their chances of a favourable reception elsewhere. The desire to win friends is clearly shown when they left the citizens with 'their civil rights' to 'govern themselves as before', and leaving the locals to impeach those who had cooked up the insurgency against pro-Athenian administration in the first place. The only occupying force left were those troops detached to build a wall down to the sea on both sides to blockade the men still holding out on the acropolis.

The rest, with the wind in their sails, then turned to make an attempt on Scione. Outriders would have already been exploring the countryside around the town but the main force moved by sea. Here too, there were good broad beaches and many thousands of men jumped down into the water wading ashore and preparing to penetrate the small coastal plain before steep wooded hills made further advance complicated. The town stood on two of these humped and rocky eminences that dropped steep to the sea and just inland from there was another very defensible mount. Here as at Mende the armed inhabitants and the Peloponnesian garrison had stationed themselves, ensuring that while they were still there the invaders would have great difficulty in walling in the town itself. But unlike at Mende, when the Athenian hoplites and their allies formed up and charged the defensive works, they smashed into the enemy line, bowling them over and driving them off the hill and back behind the city walls. They had clearly learned from the botched attempt before, and this business was carried out with considerably more method and care. This success, apart from warranting a trophy, meant they were in a position to throw up walls of circumvallation to pen the inhabitants in. But before the siege works could be completed the defenders received some welcome reinforcements. The men holding out in the acropolis at Mende had managed to slip over the wall built to cage them in, and got through to Scione just a few short miles down the peninsula.

This was the picture that Brasidas pieced together as he took stock after extracting himself and his men from the Lyncestian adventure. But it was not all bad news; whether he knew it or not the authorities back home had decided the man on the spot needed reinforcing. An officer called Ischagoras had been deputed to take another army overland to reinforce the considerable success that had been achieved in the north. But developments meant these people were not going to find it easy to win through to where their presence might make a difference. Perdikkas had been very upset with Brasidas' behaviour in the summer war, and when he learned the Athenians had arrived in the Chalcidice in force he sent peace feelers to Nicias who responded well. With this volte-face the whole picture changed, and, to show good will to his new friends, the Macedonian persuaded his contacts in Thessaly to put a block on any Peloponnesians entering their country.

But if the army could not get through, the leaders, Ischagoras, Amaeinias and Aristeus did slip past, informing Brasidas when they appeared that they had been sent by the government back home to look into what he had been doing. And these were not the only new arrivals at this time. The home administration also sent a number of men who would normally have been too young for command to replace some of those already serving under Brasidas. One of these, called Clearidas son of Cleonymus, was given a command in Amphipolis and another Pasitelidas, son of Hegesander at Torone, but altogether these developments are quite confusing. The Spartans not infrequently sent out officials to report on and sometimes oversee her commanders on service overseas, even the kings on campaign were quite usually constrained in this way. Brasidas, as we have seen, had acted in such a role in the recent past. Worrying about adventurers in Thrace was not a new thing for the authorities in Sparta: Pausanias the victor of Plateau had made himself persona non grata when he started intriguing to build a power base in this part of the world, and the particular vision of Brasidas surrounded by his helot bodyguard, backed by Thracian gold and myriads of auxiliaries, must have been difficult for many at home. We know this was definitely part of the Spartan administration's motivation, because we are specifically told that important figures were both jealous of what Brasidas had achieved and concerned his activities did not gel with the push to find an accommodation with Athens that would allow the prisoners from Sphacteria to be repatriated. Yet this doesn't answer all the questions. For, if this was the intention why did they send out young men, who,

by the very nature of their age, could have little authority. After this we hear no more of any constraints on Brasidas, who clearly remained just as belligerently in control as before. In fact, the next notice has him making an attempt on the Athenians' most important remaining strongpoint in the Chalcidice, despite the truce being clearly still meant to be not only in force but having some months to run.

Brasidas had accomplished much in the short time since he bravely marched north from the Peloponnese. He had only received limited military backing. Not for him as far as we know, a comradely group of peers to form his council, and none of the regiments of proper Spartiates that were famed across the battlefields of Greece. Nor for him any chance to cherry pick the best Peloponnesian League warriors available, he had gone with few resources and those he had been given were very questionable indeed at the beginning. But with these slim and experimental means he had completely changed the balance of power in this crucial resource rich north country. He had taken control of Athens' two most important posts namely Amphipolis and Torone. He had brought most of the rest of Chalcidice, whether Greek colonists or indigenous people, over to his side. He had not achieved this alone. Local power players had been key to what had been done. Without the encouragement of the Macedonians, and their striving king, the enterprise could not have even been attempted in the first place. But much had been accomplished and Brasidas could have been forgiven for relaxing, but this was not his way. His ambition was still far from slaked, and he started out the next year very early indeed 'at the close of the same winter in fact almost in spring'. The importance of Potidaea was always clear, stopping up the Pellene peninsula, and allowing control of the waters on both sides of the narrow neck. So the Peloponnesians set out from Torone, the men sleek and eager from a comfortable winter, and making sure they arrived at the objective in the dark. They brought ladders with them and apparently even got them placed up against the walls before the alarm was raised. Scouts had been studying the place for some time and allowed the attackers to judge the time when the guard was changed and have the best chance of getting over the defences without being seen. But all their planning came to nothing as the alarm was raised, and sufficient defenders responded that any assault became impossible. This had been a long shot from the beginning, and Brasidas, when he realised it had not paid off, pulled his men back rather than risk heavy casualties for nothing.

When the Peloponnesians had arrived in the north, there had been a tangle of factions, some hostile, some neutral, others potentially friendly, but a way had been found by Brasidas to navigate through them. This was a crucial matter, as friends with local knowledge and influence were a requisite for a Spartan foothold to be gained and retained. Yet this presence was a fragile plant with roots only loosely catching at the soil, as the Athenian response on the Pellene had showed in the starkest fashion. Whether it could survive at all was a question that would soon be answered and the odds looked to have got considerably longer than when the Spartan army of the north set out from Megara. Now, it was going to be the full force of the Athenians' military muscle, seconded by former friends from Macedonia and Thrace, which Brasidas would have to face.



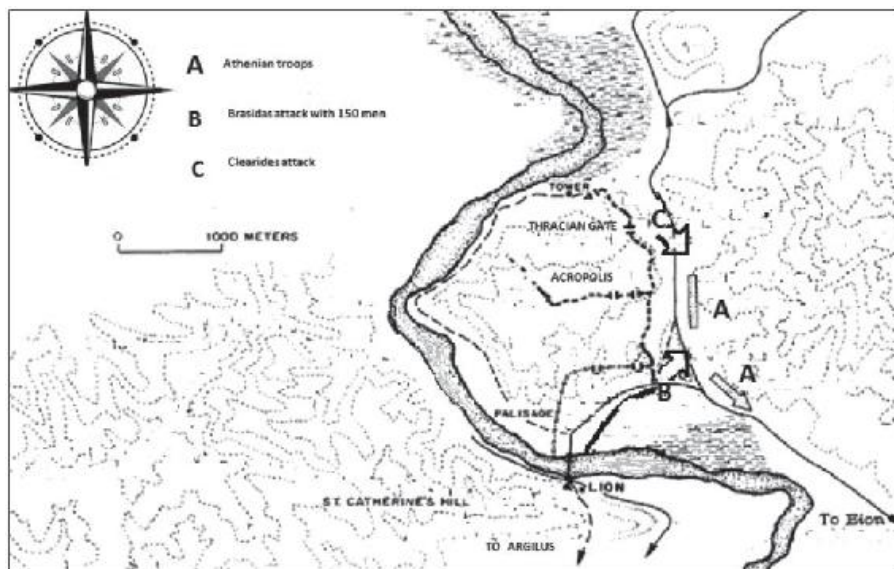
## Chapter Ten

### Two Deaths at Amphipolis

It would have been a sun-bright day in summer, when a great throng crowded the streets and quays of Piraeus in anticipation of some lively political and military theatre. All sorts and conditions of people from the town of Athens must have passed between the long walls that covered the route from the Metropolis to the walled port; citizens, *metics*, slaves and foreign tourists; even children and women, although only females for hire were usually seen openly in the streets, who had come out to see off the men-folk on campaign. There were gaps in the ranks of the people, whether hoplites, oarsmen or just ordinary families noticeable since the beginning of the war. A few were battle casualties, but most were victims of the great plague, the memory of which was only a few years past. But Athenians were buoyant people, and since the triumph at Pylos, and despite the defeat at Delium, thoughts about the coming campaign were all about optimism. The Assembly had been persuaded by Cleon, the victor on Sphacteria, that they must reinforce the northern front where the picture had changed for the better, with a diplomatic volte face amongst the key local players. The coming onto the Athenian side of Perdiccas of Macedonia and some Thracian warlords, with military resources to burn, meant it was possible to imagine digging the Spartan enemy totally out from the timber and gold-rich region, control of which the Athenians had coveted for generations. Cleon had been behind the decision to send Nicias and the other generals against Mende and Scione the year before, with particularly brutal instructions to slaughter the traitorous people in the latter place, for having gone over to Brasidas, and now he intended even more.

The motivation of Cleon and the rest of the Athenian leadership at this time was complex; that there was unhappiness with the privations suffered, even war weariness among some, is suggested by the agreement to the truce in 423 BC but this in no way tells the whole story. Most of the generals following Cleon did not consider this arrangement with Sparta restricted at all how they dealt with their rebellious tributaries, and were all for an expansive effort in the north. They intended this as not only important in itself, but also the hope was that success there would carry weight with their Assembly constituency at home. The Athenian people were in a tetchy mood at

this time. There were difficulties because of large numbers of Boeotian refugees in Attica after the Delium fiasco, and there were some xenophobic excesses at this time. So, success in this foreign adventure looked attractive from lots of viewpoints. It wasn't quite the British government in 1914 AD seeing the benefits of a military distraction from insoluble issues in Ireland and with the trade unions and suffragettes, but still Cleon could have been happy enough to leave domestic issues behind him for the moment.



**Map 8: The Battle of Amphipolis.**

We can imagine a very busy city in the weeks before the departure, with the likes of the magistrate in 'Lysistrata' protected by Scythian policemen visiting the treasury on the Acropolis to get money to buy our blades. The bullion was kept in the ruined temple of Athena that had been destroyed by Xerxes, and was retained in its shattered condition as a reminder of that awful and heroic time. Rigging and masts had to be purchased too with public money or from the purses of rich men who competed to fit out triremes, paying for the efforts of the best shipwrights and carpenters, to gain the prize for the warship the commander-in-chief would deem the best outfitted. The poorer citizens got their sea gear together, and, if their numbers were not sufficient to occupy all the ships' benches, again there were plutocrats who, to burnish their civic reputations, might hire slaves to pack the empty places. Of course the hoplite core of the expeditionary army was made up of better-off men and some could afford showy equipment, emblazoned shields, helmets tricked out with feathers, as

well as the best swords and spears available. Yet even these faded in comparison with the cavalrymen, organising safe and comfortable on-board lodgings, for not just themselves but their valuable mounts as well. These men were the scions of the oldest and wealthiest aristocratic families decked out in the best equipment money could buy. They might have been reluctant to accept equality with the hoi polloi when it came to political decision making but would ensure everybody appreciated the difference when it came to what they wore when they went to war. Indeed, where and how they fought showed up the class difference too, whether in combat their arses rested on a saddlecloth worn by a high-toned warhorse or on bench cushions by the ships' oars.

It was always exciting when a great fleet left, with the last bags of rations and supplies being hurried on board along the gangplanks, the last men climbing the ladders onto the decks, and this would have been no exception. While those left behind wrestled with conflicting emotions, worry over danger to loved ones but also the potential for glory, reputation and reward. Cleon led the way as the officers embarked after the libations were made and prayers intoned for a successful voyage, and the order was given to sound the trumpets that set the whole armada in motion. One after another the sleek and beautiful triremes passed out of the harbour of Zea, the basin where the war fleets were kept in their protective sheds, pointing towards Phalerum bay which had been the main port in the old days before Themistocles built the trireme navy and the Piraeus to house it. This was a huge community effort, not quite what would be done in seven years time for the invasion of Syracuse but still something very considerable indeed. And it is worth noting that the 300 cavalry, drawn from the city elite, who embarked on this enterprise were ten times as many as first went on that later occasion.

Cleon was the undisputed leader in the enterprise. There was no divided command as there would be in the Syracuse war or indeed had been the case when he had last gone out on campaign. We don't know the names of the other generals elected with Cleon in early summer of 422 BC, nor those of Cleon's colleagues who commanded the fleet, though the latter may be more to do with our sources' desire for all the blame for defeat to be laid at the feet of his *bête noir* than anything else. Even when they had success like the man who attacked the port at Torone they do not get mentioned by name. But if a unified command would be a good thing, ensuring decisive strategy, it might

be dangerous too, held by a man, who up until then had largely excelled in civilian leadership and might not possess the military expertise required. What is evident is that Cleon himself had had a real change of attitude from the time not long before when he reluctantly took up the sword against the garrison of Sphacteria. Then he was almost handed command against his will, more or less ambushed into accepting the responsibility for the expedition to Pylos. On that occasion he had raised the issue of the incompetence of the generals in charge on the Pnyx, and rhetoric about how he could do better had been unexpectedly taken up. But now it was different. Cleon had clearly been affected by that success; it had changed the war, enshrined his reputation and popularity in a way that might have turned a less egotistical head than his. History has not a few examples of political men who after early success felt they could command armies far more effectively than professionals trained to the trade. This was even more likely to be the case in ancient societies where the price of citizenship anyway included hefting a shield and carrying a spear. But that his experience had made no Caesar or Alexander out of this man of words would soon become apparent, and this time he would have no Demosthenes to act as a battlefield executive. Warfare had become more complex in the long conflict between Sparta and Athens, and some members of the expeditionary force must have worried they would suffer from the lack of a more experienced commander to give Cleon the benefit of sage advice.

So, after the end of the Pythian Games, when the truce had expired, and in good late-summer weather, Cleon sailed with what was a considerable fleet of thirty ships. Though this could be too late a date: because there are hints that Cleon had to persuade the Assembly to let him take command of the expedition that can only mean he had not yet officially started his midsummer term as general. They had, of course, been up for this unconstitutional stuff before when sending the same man off to Pylos, though he had not been elected general at all. Whatever the exact time in the calendar, it was Cleon leading out triremes with decks refitted to carry 1,200 hoplites, 300 cavalry and a force of allies even larger than the number of citizens, showing how important this front was now considered. This time, the victor of Sphacteria was being entrusted with much more than a few hundred light-armed infantry, he was at the head of a good proportion of the whole citizen levy and hundreds of the young men from the richest families. This army now included many of Cleon's political constituency, and if his confidence was high he must have realised the

risks were great too; a disaster at the head of these people with so many influential family and friends back home could mark the end of his career, if not his being dragged before the courts with the possibility of exile or even death. He would have known Thucydides well from around the Athenian corridors of power, and the results of a military setback on that coming man's career had, very recently, been made abundantly clear. And later events suggest that some of the men who loaded onto the ships had their doubts about Cleon, and indeed not a few of the great expeditions leaving the Piraeus in these war years seemed to have done so with dark clouds riding over them, whether because of smashed phalluses on the city's Hermes or because leaders were reluctant to take charge.

But the Assembly-fixer-turned-military-chief was confident as the vessels of his task force rounded point Sunion with hulls down riding the cross waves coming down from Euboea, sweeping through the Euripus channel up past the coast of Thessaly before, with sails piled on and oarsmen straining, they crossed over towards the shore near the town of Scione. Here he found the place was actually still being besieged, but this ongoing enterprise was not of such concern for this man with another bigger picture in his head:

‘He sailed to Scionê, where he added to his force soldiers from the besiegers of the city.’<sup>1</sup>

He ordered the commanders there to detach their best hoplites to join him, and these men probably went with alacrity having spent almost half a year camping out on the rugged flank of Pellene, in a part of Greece where winter weather could be harsh. After this stopover they weighed anchor again to carry on against the target Cleon always had in mind. A short twenty-mile or so hop brought them to the territory of Torone, Brasidas' headquarters on the next-door Sithonian promontory.

The Athenian triremes made landfall at the harbour of Cophosa, the position of which is not exactly known but was very well protected and near enough to the town. It was almost certainly the enclosed bay to the south, as from there the land forces and warships could deploy as they pleased against the defenders' works. Cleon heard from some deserters, who had slipped out of the city and into his beachside camp, that the Spartan was not at home. It was a refulgent opportunity; the only people present were a garrison commanded by Pasitolidas, nowhere near substantial enough to face the Athenians in a straight scrap. So hoping to take advantage, Cleon projected a

fighting show of teeth and claws to intimidate the defenders. He marched his army towards the town walls, while ten ships, fitted for battle, were deputed to break into Torone harbour. The defences Cleon and his men found themselves facing had only recently been thrown up, on Brasidas' orders, with the stones from the original walls that had cut the neighbourhood off from the town.

'He then tried to expand the city's walls by including the harbour suburb.'<sup>2</sup>

The invaders' approach was swift and well coordinated which completely unstrung the man in command of the defence. As the hoplites cleared the road and attacked these makeshift ramparts in a banner-swept rush, Pasitelidas tried to keep them out by bringing his own heavy infantry round to show ranks of spears and shields, while his light troops hurled missiles down on the enemy below them. But he was hugely outnumbered, and his men, soon enough, found it almost impossible to keep the Athenians out. This coincided with word that the invaders' triremes, decks crowded with armed men, were rounding the harbour mouth, and likely to enter, virtually without a fight, from the seaward direction. The Spartan commander clearly did not see this as his Thermopylae moment and, with the outer works untenable, his determination frayed and broken, he fled pell-mell with the men immediately about him up the streets of the suburb towards the old walls where he hoped to find safety. But it was all to no avail. Not only were the men from the ships already on the harbour walls but those chasing after Pasitelidas found the defences he had put his hopes in even easier to overcome than the outer ones. These once-solid fortifications had been the very quarries used to source the stone for the outer walls. There were points along the circumference where they had been completely pulled down.

The end was inevitable; those of the garrison that had made it back that far were cut down, many by those Athenians or locals who had survived the Spartan takeover. They had joined the ranks of the returning army and wanted payback, looking for blood revenge and to restore their lost fortunes ruined by the war. These men who had recent memories of running for their lives to the fort to escape Brasidas were not going to be tender with known enemies they now found in Torone. Those not killed were overrun and captured, and, when this disconsolate group of Peloponnesians and Toronians were rounded up and counted, amongst them was found the red-cloaked commander himself, who not only had not found a glorious death but

had also managed to be taken prisoner. This was a fate he particularly seemed to have wished to avoid. In fact if he and the other defenders had managed to hold out only a few hours longer then they might have avoided this ignominious denouement, as Brasidas, hearing of the Athenian descent, had marched hard with the main army to their relief. Indeed, though the news took some time to travel to his camp, he had reacted with alacrity, and was only four miles up the road from Torone when it had been taken. On receipt of these tidings, and when it became clear no rescue could be accomplished, he turned back to prepare for the fight to come with an Athenian host that was looking like it might well be a match for his own.

As Cleon had the enemy corpses stripped and two trophies built, one for the fight at the walls and one for that at the port, any misgiving either on his own part or that of his men as to his military capacity would surely now have greatly diminished despite an attempt by our record keeper to suggest the victory was largely due to the troops' initiative rather than their commander. At the first stroke Cleon had taken what had, before the capture of Amphipolis, been his enemies' main centre of operations, and to refill his campaign chest he sold most of the locals into slavery. Only 700 armed enemies, Chalcidian or others of Sparta's allies, were sent to Athens as prisoners of war; clearly here was an element of taking hostages to make their fellow citizens think twice about flouting Athenian authority. There was no resting on his laurels though; after installing a sufficient occupying force, the army was embarked again and the ships' prows turned onwards towards what had always been the main goal of Cleon's enterprise. They could not use Xerxes' canal, as the Peloponnesians controlled the towns thereabout, so the journey was around the rugged tip of the Athos promontory, generally safe in the height of the sailing season, before hugging the coast en-route to reach the territory of Eion and Amphipolis.

This prolegomenon had been very impressive, but now Cleon would have to really prove his worth, face to face with Brasidas. The most formidable hawks from the two main contending cities were to have a chance to settle things between themselves, with nothing to forestall a confrontation. Soon the port of Eion came clearly into the Athenians' view, with the Strymon winding out to the sea. There, on the lovely sands of Ofrinio strand, Cleon beached his ships, having completed the run from Torone. It was a simple matter to haul their warships up over the sand and shingle to where they were safe in this

place down by the river that had remained in Athenian hands, and so was available. It provided a convenient campsite where the army and fleet could set up in comfort. The facilities on the coast allowed safe and easy lines of communication and supply, courtesy of Athens' uncontested control of the seaways. There was no show of opposition from local Chalcidian polities; they really had no fleets nor indeed any recent tradition of naval warfare, one of the by-products of the Delian League had been that the members, being protected by the Athenian ships they part paid for, had no need to retain the maritime skills that their fathers and grandfathers might have had. And the Spartans had never had a significant number of warships in the vicinity.

The men put up their lines of tents and made themselves at home down by the shore, where the air was strong with salt, sending servants out to forage, to draw water and find food. Once settled, with Eion thoroughly secured, the next goal for the Athenians was Stagirus, an Andrian colony halfway back down and controlling the coast road towards Xerxes' canal. Unfortunately they were kept out by the sturdy defenders there, but apart from this setback they had success. Galepsus, another colony planted from Thasos, ten miles the other way east down the coast, quickly succumbed to an energetic escalade. There is an argument made from the tribute lists<sup>3</sup>, <sup>3a</sup> that Cleon actually took back a good few other places at this time, communities not name-checked by Thucydides, but the evidence is thinnish. Yet whether true or not the evidence must have been building up for at least some of his doubters that their man might actually succeed in cutting Brasidas' communications with Sparta, to leave him to wither on the vine if he was not able to evict him altogether.

Cleon and his officers had a fine view upriver towards the almost-conical hill on which stood the target city, yet still they were not rushing anything, and their movements were steady and cautious. Now that the troops were well established, Cleon looked to take advantage of those factors that had been so crucial in his deciding to undertake this enterprise in the first place. He could now, since the diplomatic volte face of the previous year, call on the local powers whose support had previously made such a difference to Brasidas. Envoys were rushed down the roads to Pella and also to the northeast, to the court of Polles the ruler of the Thracian Odomantians, who were both requested in the strongest terms to second the great efforts being made to expel their common Peloponnesian enemies. The Macedonian king was asked to come with his whole army, and the



other to bring however many Thracian mercenaries he could recruit, presumably on a promise of pay being provided once they arrived.

The coalition Brasidas headed, however, still had plenty of muscle, and in this final showdown he had managed to get together an army from all round the region, produced in numbers by many who still had faith in him. There were 1,500 mercenaries from Thrace, some Edoni cavalry and *peltasts*, 1,000 Myrcinian and Chalcidian light infantry, local troops familiar with the country, and fighting for hearth and home. With them at Amphipolis were his own 2,000 hoplites and 300 Hellenic horse to provide the real menacing biting edge. When news arrived that the invaders had established themselves at the mouth of the river, it was determined that the army should divide, 1,500 marching in company with Brasidas out of town, while the remainder stayed with an officer called Clearidas in Amphipolis itself. We know little of this man before this time except he took command on the same occasion that the unfortunate Pasitелidas was established at Torone. But despite his recent arrival, Brasidas must have trusted him to give him such a vital role in proceedings. They made a solid team and, indeed, without opposition or comment, he took responsibility after his commander-in-chief's death. The soldiers who followed Brasidas, tramping west on the road out of town, did not go far before establishing a defended camp just across the river on high ground called Cerdylum. The spot is not exactly determined, but it may well have been what is now known as Saint Catherine's hill, that rises steeply to over 300 feet on the other side of the Strymon from Amphipolis. Why he took post there is not explained, but no doubt it was partly as an observation station, from where they could keep an eye out for enemies coming both up the road from Eion and along the coast from the west. It was, after all, from that direction that they might expect the Macedonian army, old friends turned enemies, to emerge.

But this would only have been part of it; the key to Brasidas' thinking was that he expected, by positioning himself on this outside strongpoint, to make it very difficult for his enemies to surround the town and trap him behind its walls. To have allowed this to happen would have handed the initiative completely to the foe. This positioning of part of the army outside the town is another example of the tactic that had been utilised with mixed success by the defenders at Mende and Scione; something of an innovation, but one very understandable for a defender who was outnumbered, the practice

seems to have become something of an orthodoxy amongst the Spartan military at this time. It was a halfway house between coming out to give face-to-face battle against the odds or just cowering behind the city walls. It utilised the terrain to try and give some advantage to the defenders without the downside of allowing themselves to be besieged. There was probably something else that Brasidas worried over about the people back in Amphipolis. He must have expected pressure to betray him would become strong if he had stayed to fight it out from behind their walls, with the lives and property of the population inevitably being put at risk. By giving the impression he intended to fight outside he might have ameliorated most of these worries. Though events showed he was wrong in his judgment of the loyalty of these people, the evidence from what happened after is that the townsfolk seemed to have genuinely had faith in him. After the battle, they enclosed a tomb for the dead general in front of the marketplace and honoured him as their founder, conveniently forgetting Hagnon's contribution. And this despite the Athenians were slated to get back control of the city after a cessation of fighting was arranged in the following year.

This was the picture that faced the Athenian high command as they took stock at Eion, hoping any minute to hear of the approach of friendly Thracians and Macedonians. Nor were these the only positives that they hoped might come into play; they expected people in the city might change sides once they saw the impressive army being led against them. This, after all, had been an Athenian colony, and if most of those of actual Attic ancestry had been culled after the Spartan takeover, they hoped many were left with links and sympathy to the old master, who now looked once more in the ascendant. We don't know, but it can be surmised that such people would have been feeding information to Cleon's camp in the days while the two sides stared at each other along the river. But, however good the odds looked, Brasidas was a veteran of great reputation, and Cleon must have felt his own lack of military experience as he prepared to face him. Feeling the pressure of being in charge on the front line may have sapped his confidence, and this was picked up by the men, and a number of these Athenians were not backward in letting the general know how they felt. It was transmitted as a desire to be up and at the enemy, the men asserting they did not understand why they had come so far, done so much and were now kept inactive. Athenian inclination was not to automatically accept another's authority anyway, whether they were competitive aristocrats or independent sailors, and the

troops were the same kind of political animals; not prepared to keep their opinions to themselves whether it was in the free debate of the city Assembly or the ordered life of a military camp. Discipline in almost any Greek army except the Spartans could always be shaky; there was no hierarchy of corporals or sergeants to batter the soldier into obedience, and any punishments that are recorded were usually dealt out at the hands of the generals themselves. It was peer pressure, love of country and fear for reputation, the desire to gain prizes rather than to avoid punishment that counted. In fact, it was as often as not back home that bad conduct came to roost, where we occasionally hear of returned citizen soldiers taken to court for misdemeanours in the field. This was the kind of army Cleon had to contend with as he planned strategy in the command tent with his officers.

Even if personally inclined to play a waiting game, Cleon's strategy was clearly affected by the bellicosity of his men. A sea change in the mind seems to have been wrought as it is reported 'the temper of the general was what it had been at Pylos' as he prepared to march out his eager men. The transformation is interesting, but clearly not complete as he still had no intention of bringing on a full-blown battle. Standing at the head of the army in marching column he was aiming only for a reconnaissance in force. Heralds had circulated, knocking up the warriors to prepare for the march, with armour being burnished. The camp servants cooked a pre-dawn breakfast. The camp at Eion became like a smoked-out wasp nest of activity as the officers, soldiers and servitors prepared arms and provisions for what was known to be a march of hardly two miles. As the sun began to burn off the morning haze 1,200 Athenian hoplites and 300 horse swung up the road with an even larger number of allied troops accompanying them, while local warriors from the surrounding country joined as well. Cleon was anticipating the arrival of the Macedonians and Thracians anytime, and did not intend to risk combat before their extra numbers gave him a real edge. The most he had in mind would have been to keep the troops busy, and hopefully more content, while he took a detailed look at his enemies' preparations and position; to examine the terrain and discover how he might surround the town once these anticipated arrivals gave him the numbers to allow it.

The Athenian army strode up the road from Eion, passing by Amphipolis before climbing towards the high ground to the east of the city defences. It would have been hard in the heat, the time of year was good for most things but not climbing a one-in-five gradient

through slopes covered in scruffy brushwood where goats would normally have grazed but had now been scared away by the sight and sounds of such a number of men, when they would have been used just to a solitary herdsman. Exactly where the formations deployed after the short march is not known but it had to have been somewhere on the high ground above the valley, down which the road from Eion went past the walls of the city. These hills were steep enough that, up on the slope, the Athenians had a view of the town and even beyond to the river that flowed 200 yards wide from the north. The view continued, on the west side of the habitations, with waterlogged marshes that overspread the low country immediately above and below Amphipolis. There has been a detailed debate,<sup>4</sup> over the years, about which was the actual hill where the Athenians deployed; some consider a smaller but striking eminence, northeast of the town, just over from the northern bend of the river, as the place. But a more convincing argument holds to high ground immediately east of the town that fits much more comfortably with the events as they unfolded. Whichever was right, the Athenians lined up in their serried ranks, with heavy *hoplon* shields weighing down their left shoulders. They saw no sign of any troops emerging to contest their approach to the fortifications or even of many on the walls themselves. Through the clear air, the place looked both very close and eminently vulnerable. It dawned that no orders had been given to bring up ladders or any other equipment that might allow an attempt at an escalade. Many of the grumblers who had been questioning Cleon's leadership and had forced the army's move in the first place, must have felt vindicated when this was discovered. So confidence in the general's competence for some continued to ebb, and may have been a factor in the confusion that played such a part in the fighting to come.

In fact the city was by no means as defenceless as it looked. Brasidas knew the odds had moved against him in the past season but he had achieved much in the region, and seeing the enemy columns snaking along the road from the sea he was not about to give up without a fight. The old base at Torone had been lost, local kings and warlords who had been his allies had now apparently become his enemies and knightly Macedonian horse, Thracian *peltasts* and Chalcedonian javelineers would soon be lining up against him. Yet despite this he was determined to fight with all the might and main he could muster against the enemy who was trying to take advantage of these changed circumstances. These Spartans were defined by their bravery, even those who missed out on battle through no fault of their

own might be called a 'trembler', so there was no possibility of Brasidas not rising to the occasion. This general particularly was not a man to await the time and places of his enemy's choosing, and as soon as he had seen the enemy in Eion was up and on the march he had reacted, collapsing his camp, ordering his 1,500 men, ready to go at a moment's notice, to descend the Cerdylum hill, cross over the bridge and go back to the walled precincts of the city itself.

Brasidas had gone up onto the hill so as not to be trapped in Amphipolis but now had come back because he glimpsed an opportunity, a chance to take on the enemy before their allies arrived, and while they were at a disadvantage because of the laxness of their deployment. They might be preparing to assault or to set up siege lines, but in the posture they were adopting he thought he saw the glimmerings of an opening to defeat them. Once through the gates, back with Clearidas and with the army united, Brasidas, we learn, made plans. A hurried council of war heard that their leader was determined to fight then and there. He might be a little outnumbered in heavy infantry with so many of his men being lighter armed than the Athenian hoplites and the very good heavy infantry provided by their island allies from Lemnos and Imbros. This had been the reason Cleon's men saw so few sentinels on the walls when they arrived, as they had been ordered to keep off the walls so the opposition could gain no morale advantage from seeing how lightly equipped so many were. In fact it was a sufficiently even contest, with both sides having put plenty of resources into the pot. Brasidas was fielding getting on for 5,000 men, and Cleon a little over that number, and the Spartan had decided on something to counter the difference. This was something for which his people were well known. The Spartans had a well-attested reputation for trickery; the same people who through the *agoge* produced the bravest hoplite warriors were happy to employ battlefield stratagems, and this was what Brasidas now intended. In it he saw a chance of victory.

Brasidas explained to his officers that he again intended a division of forces; this time a picked group of 150 of his best hoplites would be detached from the rest. The Spartan general had noticed that the enemy army seemed about to move back to their base at Eion, which would entail them turning into a column of route, so exposing their right unshielded side and allowing the men waiting in the city a chance to strike. With this in mind he decided on immediate action; he would himself lead the attack with this small force against the

vulnerable flank of the passing centre of Cleon's army. The rest of the men, under Clearidas, would sally out against the rear of the retreating enemy and pounce on a foe already disrupted by the impact of his commandos. Brasidas, determined on his design, now processed to the top of the Acropolis because, before a sword could be drawn, the proprieties had to be respected. The saying that there are no atheists in the trenches is, while correct, pretty irrelevant. Where it is life or death on the line, any kind of superstition will be clung to by people with nothing to lose. The Greeks were no different. Although the standard-bearers of rational thought they always kept to the traditional religious forms at the outset of combat, particularly Spartans who were known for their meticulous piety. But this time, the burned offerings and peering into the entrails was not done on a rough field altar, of mud or stone, but was carried out at the temple to Athena on the top of the Acropolis. There, the congregation hoped the goddess would favour those giving gifts, and knew at the very least that it could not hurt.

With the preliminaries performed, Brasidas explained what he had in mind to the army drawn up before him. Old themes were stressed, but nonetheless ones that resonated; he called on his own Dorian followers first, reprising their back catalogue of victories against Ionians like the Athenians, before turning on the rostrum to put some fire into the bellies of the rest of those present. It was needed, as it would have been understandable if plenty were jittery staring across at the spectacle of a fearsome enemy host covering the slopes outside the walls. He underscored the key role of his young lieutenant, who, as a Spartan, needed to show the way to the allies who would follow him. This may have been the last but it was far from the least important of the messages he was trying to get across about the complicated battle plan he intended to attempt. All such combined operations with divided forces had the possibility of ending in disaster. A party might be delayed, or units could get lost parading through the un-signposted city streets or in rugged open country outside the ramparts. The reason most generals walked up to the foe and slugged it out was not just tradition or stupidity but because it was the safe thing to do. At least in that way they could be sure that most of the army was on the field and able to make a difference as the affray played out. Any other way was not just inherently dangerous but the soldiers who would, in the end, make the difference, whose blood and courage weighed in the balance, were very likely to be unnerved by manoeuvres that did not conform to those simple jobs

they were trained to do. But Brasidas knew that if it was a monstrous risk to split the army on this occasion then the benefits might be worth it.

The mood among the soldiers was raised with this harangue, as Brasidas acted. His plans were bottomed on the assumption that Cleon was pulling out and not expecting an attack, a hypothesis made in the context of what he had seen going on in the Athenian ranks. It had been some time that Cleon and his men had been holding their position on the hills across from the town. For the Spartan to re-cross the river from St Catherine's Hill and make his obeisance at the temple of Athena must have taken several hours, even if they had started to move as soon as the enemy was noticed hurrying along the road from Eion. Initially, the Athenians were encouraged when they saw the walls of the city so scantily held, and some regretted they had not brought the siege paraphernalia that might have allowed an effectual assault. But this overconfidence was not long lasting when it was seen that the enemy troops from outside had rejoined their comrades and were processing to the Acropolis, looking very like men giving the gods their due before coming out to battle. These suspicions, we are told, were only confirmed by the sight of large numbers of soldiers' feet and horses' hooves visible behind the Thracian gate, suggesting the men inside were about to sally out to the attack. The details of this are difficult; firstly how much Cleon or his men could really see into the city is open to question, or indeed notice what was happening at the temple of Athena. The most, surely, would have been a view of soldiers climbing in procession up the Acropolis hill, sun glinting on their armour and shields. And how it was that they could see formations gathering to sally out by looking under the city gates is a hopelessly problematic matter. Clearly this could not have been done from where the main body was disposed; all that can be imagined is that scouts approached the entrance and peered through the gap at the bottom. But how they did this without being spotted and shot down is far from clear. The reality may be that a reason was required to explain the decision of the Athenians to turn and march away, and this was a way of providing one.

While the Athenians waited, it had been hot, with the sun blazing in a merciless sky; water would not have been easy to find. The men had no trouble-free access to the river down in the swale and any who tried to slake their thirst there would have had to risk the dangers from bowmen on the walls, and even of being caught by defenders

making a sortie out of the gates. In this situation further waiting had become much the least attractive of the alternatives; to turn and then march away was what Cleon had decided upon. After a hurriedly convened council of war, he sent orders to the commanders of the left wing of the army to peel off and take the road back to base at Eion. The officers were given the nod, and the men shuffled into line of march; the tread of shod feet, the creaking of leather and the clash of metal against metal was a cacophony combined with the murmurs of complaint from men who again were not sure what they were being ordered to do or why. They saw the almost-empty walls of the city in front as they descended onto the road and turned for home but why they were now on the move they did not know. Why were they going back to Eion? Why were they not advancing to the attack? Some, no doubt, were happy to retire without being put at risk but others felt differently, particularly men who had no confidence in their general and were looking for any reason to complain. As the column moved off, Cleon directed the rest of the army to follow suit, but as the horns sounded the retreat and the ranks got themselves in order the Athenian commander became concerned they were not moving with sufficient alacrity. Personally taking charge, he urged his lines of sweating armoured infantry to get down the slope and onto the road past the city walls as fast as possible. If the left had been slow in shifting then some jumpiness on Cleon's part is understandable; changing dispositions in front of the enemy was always a risky activity for even the most adept of armies.

The left wing had got some way down the road but the right and centre, with the commander himself, was still waiting or inching along behind with the city walls on their right, their unshielded side showing in that direction. Dissemination of orders at this time was pretty ad hoc. There were trumpets to sound the charge or to retire, horns to order a move of camp, or prearranged visual signals with flags or insignia. The face-to-face approach of a herald shouting directions to the men could be a bit confusing, if Onasander<sup>5</sup> is right. More accurate instructions could be given out from headquarters through the chain of command. Cleon's problem seems to be that he tried all at the same time. Trumpets directed the men to retire as he also sent out verbal orders. So the men on the left, hearing the trumpet, had set off home, but the rest, seeing the heralds coming, were waiting to see what they said. All of this may explain why Cleon, feeling they were not shifting fast enough, joined in to get them to move quicker. As they waited for commands, encouraging each other



with glances, the soldiery must have wondered where their cavalry and light troops were. There was little sign of them in the hills and gullies around, and they certainly were not arrayed to protect the flanks of the infantry. We hear nothing of the orders given to these swifter units, and it is probable many had been sent off first, knowing they were less likely to block the road for the rest.

Altogether, they were confused hikers, some well down the road to Eion, some passing the city, and those in the rear still descending the hillside. These were not to be left alone in their movements. Brasidas and his 150 were matching their manoeuvres inside the city walls. The men needed to navigate the tangle of streets to get ready to sortie, but at least they had plenty of time to do so, to shadow the enemy outside, and to get in position to strike. Having traversed much of the city they emerged from a palisaded exit, and after they had passed this wooden rampart it was then through a gate in the main city wall, then a scramble down rough country and gullies before they found themselves close to the road the enemy was taking. Once out in the open there was not an instant to lose, so the 150 hoplites raging forward with up to seventy pounds of armour on their backs were stopping for no one as they sped down the strait road at the double; over the grass and rocky slope towards the Athenians ahead of them, whose unshielded side was exposed as they trudged, almost unsuspecting, on route to Eion.

Why Brasidas took so few soldiers with him is a puzzle. There is even a suspicion it might have been corruption. Yet still the feeling is right. A commando attack with speed and surprise was the essence rather than numbers. This tallies, as if 150 men were drawn up eight or so deep they would have a front of about twenty men which would have been easy to keep together and formed in a run uphill over broken ground; a much broader formation would have found it problematic, and stopping to adjust the lines would have lost all the benefits of an ambush. So the small number should not be dismissed out of hand as improbable, particularly as Brasidas had no intention of fighting with just his 150 men for long. Their job was to throw the enemy into confusion; by the time the Athenians could respond the main body under Clearidas was supposed to have arrived to deliver the coup de gras. If the text was corrupted and Brasidas led out the 1,500 men they presumably would have been those with him from Cerdylum hill, and if this makes some sense it would have led to a very different scenario. This large force would have taken much more

time to exit first the narrow opening in the palisade, then the gate in the main wall, to form up nearly 200-shields wide, having to pick their way carefully, marching in formation over broken country. This time-consuming stuff would surely have allowed the Athenian column to notice them, turn and prepare a defensive shield wall, a grimly-held line that might be very difficult to break. So there would have been a very different affray than the one described. It is definitely a surprise attack that is reported, with Brasidas declaring that he could tell their target was disordered on seeing ‘these men stay not for us; it is apparent by the wagging of their spears and of their heads’; ‘with the assailants piling at the double, along a straight road, past the steepest part of the town’ and into the centre of the marching Athenians.

There is no doubt that the victors considered this the key moment, the epicentre of the battle where afterwards they piled the enemy arms and armour in a victory trophy. It had been a cunningly crafted attack by a battlefield general who showed real insouciance when it counted, as did the disciplined and united core of hoplites that Brasidas had with him. He knew his job thoroughly, and these troops had seconded him in many different and difficult situations in the couple of years past. These men lowered their helmets, gripped their spears, hefted their shields onto their left shoulders and readied themselves for what might be asked of them. It may have been a small fist of troops but it was clenched for striking, and when they broke into the clear there was an approximation of pandemonium in the ranks of their target. Some of the Athenians had experienced the terror of battle before but not all of them. Those who previously had only manned the watch from the city walls were just not prepared for the results of Brasidas’ attack. The sight of the dead men, hacked down on their vulnerable side, unshielded arms lopped off and torsos gashed open, was sudden and awful, showing what the iron-tipped spears and drawn swords of Brasidas’ corps could do when they hit the flank of the withdrawing centre of the army. But despite surprise increasing the confusion, with time they would have realised how few their attackers were, got over the sight of corpses littering the ground, and pulled themselves together and swatted off this puny foe. Even Brasidas could not long have persevered against the odds. The strategy had always been shot through with risk. This wild charge alone would not have done the trick. Equally crucial for the final victory was Clearidas’ part. He, as ordered, and just as Brasidas went into action, had given the command to sally out of the Thracian gate. Now his thousands of hoplites, *peltasts* and cavalry pushed as quickly as they

could through the egress in the wall. Once outside and formed, they saw, off to their right on the road to Eion, the rear of the Athenian column commanded by Cleon. Emboldened by the sight of the enemies' backs, they attacked. The cavalry and light infantry were foremost in launching the assault; they could get there first to disrupt formations by closing and throwing their missiles. But the hoplites were not far behind to deal with any organized resistance the enemy might show, and indeed the main body under Cleon did make a fight of it. This much is clear from all the evidence.

Most of the left of the Athenian army might have been out of the picture, and their officers clearly had no inclination or capacity to return and help their comrades. The cavalry seem to have been particularly noticed as they flew down the road to safety in Eion, and their reputation would suffer because of this episode for some time to come.<sup>6</sup> On top of these were the men in the centre, panicked by the surprise attack, who were no longer in the fight. But the struggle was far from over for the rest, and still well over a half of the best of Cleon's army was up for the fight. Quite how they deployed is difficult to know, as the two Peloponnesian thrusts were coming from different directions; some at least must have turned to show a face to Brasidas' few, while the main body formed in the fields in between the city and the hills, facing Clearidas' division. Against them, thousands of men on the Peloponnesian payroll moved forward, clutching well-worn weapons in damp and sweating palms. Some were veterans; Brasidas' helot hoplites and mercenaries or allies had been blooded in the fighting that had been endemic in the Chalcidice for years. These men did not let any fear show on their faces as they fanned out into open ground. But others, about to enter their first fight, would have shivered at the sight of the enemy in front of them as the sun rays threw only short shadows, and the measured tread of marching feet echoed between Amphipolis and the slopes down from which the Athenians had just descended.

On the other side, Cleon, like any Greek general of the period, was in the front rank, probably on the right of the line in the place of honour from where he waited the assault from the line of armoured enemy forming close under the city walls. There was no option in hoplite warfare for a commander to wait behind the lines to push in reserves at the opportune time. Once the sacrifices had been made, divination done, the paeon raised and the *salpinx* sounded, all were in it together, and the quality that counted was that of standing firm.

The Athenian hoplites were skilled and sturdy men, standing behind their general, and taking their lead from the plumed helmet showing where he had taken his position. War cries thundered out, raising their spirits as they advanced to clash with the enemy coming on. They may have run the final yards gaining momentum from the slope, and then when within reach the front men jabbed with ash-wood spears or cut and shoved with their shields. The men in the ranks behind gave encouragement, sometimes even pushing their comrades forward to try and bowl over the enemy in front of them. They were not rash but solid. Survival was what they hoped for by showing that bronze-stitched line that only an equal display from the other side might match.

The exact mechanics of raging combat in a hoplite phalanx fight is ardently debated. An orthodoxy has it that the men, like a rugby scrum, hunkered down to stab and press, ending in a final push and breakthrough, while the second view posits it as more a series of individual combats along the front of the battle line. And while the first option has its problems, the idea of the phalanx as a thrusting, stabbing crowd still fits better with the evidence than its polar opposite that has individual warriors breaking up to duel one-to-one with those in the line opposite. Efforts have been made to synthesise the two modes of action, and most of these battles would have had something of each at different times. But the emphasis on standing together cannot be got away from, and is bound to pull back in the direction of orthodoxy. Nor is it just the group dynamic; how the individual held his spear and positioned his body behind his shield is at issue. Suggestions of the spear being mainly used in an overhead posture have been questioned<sup>7</sup> because, despite this seeming to be what is shown in most images of these warriors moving to the attack, it would be both difficult to carry out and extremely tiring in practice; while a lower underarm hold might allow much greater range and penetration.

Still, bravery was almost a default. Many had weapons skills too, if it came to facing off man to man. Yet the stress of battle could only be endured for a questionable length of time. Armoured warriors found themselves hardly able to hear or see those around them in the tossing mass, inhaling the smell of urine and faeces, an inevitable aroma in this kind of face-to-face mayhem in this awful cauldron where some began to stumble and fall, their exposed body parts cut, stabbed or pierced by missiles, blood flowing and groans emitting from between

clenched teeth. But these Athenians were fighting still, having formed phalanx with backs facing the hill behind them to show solid front to the enemy coming at them from the Thracian gate.

This fight with the main body led by Cleon was not restricted to the men pouring out through the walls. Brasidas' brave 150 were up for more, despite many must have shivered their spears against enemy shields in the first clash. Now they veered left against the enemy in front of them, and here it was that Brasidas led, down behind his shield, in fine red robes with a blood-tinted helmet crest waving in the wind. Knowing that all eyes were on him he fought like a champion to encourage his men. Many will have fallen in the first clash, despite an armoured front veteran spearman could find a way through, stabbing with a strong and well-directed stroke over the top of the shield into an enemy's neck, or hacking below to catch an exposed thigh or a greaveless shin. A strong thrust might even puncture shield and body armour. The Spartan general pressed forward, striking from behind his Lambda-emblazoned *hoplon* shield, with aggression that took him deep into the Athenian line, making him vulnerable when those beside him were held back or cut down, so that from right and left he became exposed to the spear points and sword strokes of his foes. Soon it was not just his enemies' blood that drenched his red tunic but his own too. It was now that his men saw Brasidas fall, and his incensed comrades, fealty overmastering exhaustion, fought over his body to avoid the shame of their chief being seized.

While these men pressed this offensive against the Athenian arm, deployed in line on the summer-brown fields that sloped up the hill, the men from the city battered furiously at them too. But the defenders gave as good as they got, and their position on slightly higher ground gave an edge to compensate for a paucity of numbers as they got their second wind. Three bloody charges did not break the Athenians, yet if the defenders thought they were secure they were about to be disabused. When they paused to gain breath, and had the leisure to take notice of what was happening round them, what they saw did not make good viewing. They could see the sun glinting on the javelin heads of the enemy light infantry and cavalry using their greater mobility to get round their flanks. Now they were threatened not just from the front, but on the flanks and rear too, with no cavalry and insufficient *peltasts* to protect these vulnerable sectors. So now the right of the Athenian army and the surviving men from the centre, who had suffered from Brasidas' blow, despite standing their ground,

were in great danger. Clearidas had lost patience with head-on assaults, and decided to try another tack. If he could not crush this steady foe, he would wear them down. He sent for the commanders of the Chalcidian cavalry and the locals who provided most of his light troops, and ordered them to launch hit-and-run attacks. They had anticipated what was likely to be expected of them and reacted quickly. Coming at the enemy line in groups, they could not but find easy targets in the great cluster of warriors, who probably starting eight deep, may well have bunched up even more under the pressure of battle. Hope remained lively as many of the arrows and javelins bounced off shields and armour, but then the exposed men on the flanks and rear began to fall as they were feathered by javelins. Soldiers previously solid found themselves wounded in the unprotected flesh of the thigh or neck, and could no longer sustain the all-round pressure. Gradually individuals slipped away looking only for personal survival, then whole groups infected by terror peeled away to flee. With the rear of the files splintering, the men at the front were affected too, so the Athenian edifice shivered and collapsed.

The picture painted by Thucydides, of the fight, is that while things hung in the balance Cleon was nowhere near as solid and enduring as many of his men. He was, almost from the first contact, only intent on hectic flight. The suggestion is that on his orders much of the army was well on the way home before the fighting started, and already in a mind set of standing down. This just could not be changed in the blinking of an eye, and many were determined to follow the left wing to safety in Eion, whether as formed and ordered units or a mob of fleeing individuals. It is a version that has Cleon essentially panicking, showing himself far more fearful than those men who did stay and fight, one of the first to try and escape. But whether alone or with members of his staff the general did not find safety out of the battle line; he blundered into some agile long-distance enemy killers. These were local *peltasts*, and one of them, reportedly a Myrcinian, fatally threw at the Athenian general; this local from a few miles north of Amphipolis, dishonourably dispatching the big-city man who had come to his country.

There is, however, an alternative to this condemnatory narrative, and it is one that seems just as probable. The natural inclination is to credit that great historian who we depend on so much but on this occasion there is good reason to query him. This is not just because of the improbability of his details but also because his dislike of Cleon

gave him a very personal axe to grind. In the light of this, it makes sense to give some credence to another account of the battle that perhaps hangs together better than his confusing story, despite it coming from a man who lived a few hundred years later. Diodorus reports a conventional phalanx confrontation outside the walls of the town, with both sides deployed in two lines facing each other. Here, Brasidas is noticed as decisive but more conventional in his tactics:

‘he heard of the approach of the enemy, he formed his army in battle-order and went out to meet the Athenians. A fierce battle ensued, in which both armies engaged brilliantly, and at first the fight was evenly balanced, but later, as the leaders on both sides strove to decide the battle through their own efforts, it was the lot of many important men to be slain, the generals injecting themselves into the battle and bringing into it a rivalry for victory that could not be surpassed.’<sup>8</sup>

This is an account of a straight fight, with hoplite lines fronting up to each other with both sides giving of their best, and many of the most notable soldiers falling under the spears and swords of the desperate fighters they were facing. Brasidas was cut down in the fighting, but the Spartan general was not alone. Cleon too ‘after displaying like valour’ equally suffered fatally for his courageous participation. Cleon without the combat experience of the battle-hardened veteran Brasidas, unsurprisingly, suffered in the centre of this desperate fray, an Athenian demagogue floundering in a different element and falling, crushed down by his assailants. What is very different in this account is that there is no surprise attack by a small force led by Brasidas, and the death of both commanders is reported occurring at the epicentre of the fight, not in the chaos of rout and pursuit.

This other tradition is not without holes; an argument has even been made that if the old course of the river south of the city is accepted as the ancient one then there would not be space to fit in a conventional phalanx-to-phalanx affair between the water and the hills. But calculations show this not to be a sufficient objection. Both sides would have something between 2,000 and 3,000 heavy foot and, given a yard per hoplite, this would mean even Cleon’s slightly larger hoplite phalanx, deployed in an orthodox eight-to-ten-deep formation, would have been between 250 and 300 yards wide, and could fit into the space between the watercourse and where the hills become too steep to practically deploy a phalanx. And this is not even taking into account that a twelve-deep phalanx was not abnormal, and at Delium,

a couple of years before, the Thebans had experimented with one twenty-five files deep. It would have been tight but these Greek heavy infantry could have adjusted to the space available outside Amphipolis while the *peltasts* and light infantry could, anyway, have happily set up on the steeper ground.

That it seems a tale of daring-do by heroes on both sides should not in itself bring it into question. It could be a sort of trope, but then again it was what these men did. The need for reputation, the glory that would be the only thing left after their death, makes it quite believable. Obviously there were cowards; fleeing for your life, dropping your shield like the poet Archilochus, was a fact of life, but so equally was the acceptance of a brave death as the high point of life; this was not just a Spartan credo. So this evidence perhaps should be considered more plausible than it usually is, particularly as Diodorus is getting his facts from someone less tainted by partiality. So it is believable that:

‘Brasidas, after fighting with the greatest distinction and slaying a very large number, ended his life heroically; and when Cleon also, after displaying like valour, fell in the battle.’<sup>9</sup>

That Cleon fell at the head of his soldiers is as would be expected; not dropped by wounds from behind while running for his life. His life may not have mainly been spent on the battlefield but still he knew more than most what a disaster it would be to have his reputation marred by any accusations of cowardice, something which would, if it were true, have stopped his known inclusion amongst the inscribed names of the glorious war dead.

Whichever of these two accounts is more truthful, it would have been a terrible scene as Cleon’s army broke in blood. Athenians and their allies ran for their lives, terrified men breaking clear of the mayhem only to be chased down by the Chalcidian troopers, local *peltasts* and pursuing hoplites. The fugitives helped each other out where they could; that they had run did not mean comradeship meant nothing, and the consolation was the enemy now were looking for easy prey. Nobody on the winning side wanted to be the last to die, so many soon stalled and others were so dog tired all they wanted was to rest on their arms. These men were not going to push it when, in the pursuit, hoplites turned from picking their way through unfamiliar terrain to form together in small groups, or retreating horsemen twisted round to threaten hard blows from on high against light-armed *peltasts* approaching too close. As often as not, at any show of



resistance the pursuers backed off and allowed the vanquished to find a path through the Thracian ravines and hills that would take them back to the blessing of safety in the camp at Eion; all nicely illustrated in Plato's reporting by Alcibiades of Socrates' experience as part of the army routed at Delium two years previously:

‘And further let me tell you, gentlemen, what a notable figure he made when the army was retiring in flight from Delium: I happened to be there on horseback, while he marched under arms. The troops were in utter disorder, and he was retreating along with Laches, when I chanced to come up with them and, as soon as I saw them, passed them the word to have no fear, saying I would not abandon them. Here, indeed, I had an even finer view of Socrates than at Potidaea – for personally I had less reason for alarm, as I was mounted; and I noticed, first, how far he outdid Laches in collectedness, and next I felt – to use a phrase of yours, Aristophanes – how there he stepped along, as his wont is in our streets, “strutting like a proud marsh-goose, with ever a side-long glance,” turning a calm sidelong look on friend and foe alike, and convincing anyone even from afar that whoever cares to touch this person will find he can put up a stout enough defence. The result was that both he and his comrade got away unscathed: for, as a rule, people will not lay a finger on those who show this disposition in war; it is men flying in headlong rout that they pursue.’<sup>10</sup>

Now not all were as cool as the philosopher in that earlier fray, and some desperate souls ran far and wide to avoid pursuers; tumbling through the night they would not have got back for many hours to the sight of the sea, where protecting Athenians' ships gently bobbed. There by the water, amongst the pitched tents they had so recently left, these defeated men adjusted to their new circumstances. They were beaten and leaderless, and the appeal of getting onto the boats to go back home was enormous. Casualties had been considerable for a combat where the numbers involved were not huge, and the ground over which the battle had been fought would have been covered with dead and dying, lying at random where they fell or piled together for interment before they became too decomposed and malodorous in the afternoon sun. Absent from these reeking and hacked-about heroes was the commander of the victorious army, but he was still just as dead. Brasidas' involvement had been personally very costly. He led from the front, no kamikaze searching for a glorious end, but still the first man into combat who knew that every fight was a gamble, a dice throw with death. The general, mortally wounded, would have been

carried away from the field of blood by his body servants, and at least he had the consolation of hearing his army had won a great victory before he died. And there is a story that after the battle it was not just his own men who revered the man but that the citizens of Amphipolis instituted those regular games so beloved of the Greeks to celebrate the Spartan who had died defending their city. Running, jumping, wrestling and the fitting religious ceremonial would commemorate this man as the real founder of the city.

For the defeated it had been a slaughter, with Cleon, the man who had started so high and fallen so low, and 600 others killed in action. It must have been with horror when, after a truce had been granted, the survivors saw the numbers of bodies of comrades they received, many with wounds to their backs received during the rout and pursuit. Cleon's enterprise had come apart at the seams and that the whole debacle had started as an attempt at a reconnaissance in force was no consolation at all. The most, perhaps, the Athenian leadership expected would have been to mark out where they might draw their lines to surround the town once their allies came up and they had the numbers to occupy them. Yet it had turned into a full-scale combat, and after that a scene of carnage and ruin. One of Athens' most considerable civic efforts had come to grief when all the signs looked favourable, and, more than this, the leader who had given the city the nearest thing to a consistent policy since Pericles had been cut down. If Cleon had been far from universally loved, still he had been the greatest political figure at Athens for the last five years, and his demise was bound to be of significance.

On the other side there was a void too, both on the spot at Amphipolis and amongst an elite in the Eurotas valley that did not count many charismatic individuals like Brasidas in their number. The officer corps that he had fostered and led were brought up short, faced with the task of giving the final rites to the broken body of the man who they had been so used to following. When Clearidas took stock, at least he had far fewer men to moan for, there is even a silly suggestion that only seven perished on the Spartan side. But if this was a plus, it must have been offset by the confirmation that his wounded commander-in-chief had just expired and that he was in charge now. A great victory had been achieved but what it meant was going to be difficult to evaluate. The men who had taken over from Brasidas not only had to sift through immediate intelligence reports, but they also had to try and grasp the big picture too.

What did soon become clear was that the leaderless and dispirited enemy pausing for breath at Eion were only now interested in saving themselves. They hardly paused in their flight, heading back home to Athens as soon as the postbattle rituals were accomplished. But what this would mean in terms of the mastery of the northern literal was still very far from clear. Would Amphipolis be a battle that made the difference, to be remembered like Marathon, Salamis and Plateau, or just another encounter where the dead might be honoured by family and friends but have little impact on the tide of history. Dented armour and fine shields, cloaks and tunics taken from butchered Athenian officers might make for immediate joy and profit, but would all end being just part of a battlefield trophy and hardly signifying anything more. Would the empty stare of Brasidas, the dead hero of the day, perceive any great meaning as it took in the road from Amphipolis to Eion that his enemy had so recently scampered back down in rout?

What definitely was clear was that, whatever numbers of Macedonians or Thracian allies were still on their way, without Athenian leadership they were unlikely to have much impact now. But would the new circumstances allow the victors to really exploit their success? Much would depend on the authorities at Sparta; if they showed the kind of determination their compatriots around Amphipolis had then much might have been achieved, and if the northern effort ended up a spavined enterprise it would be because of a lack of response from those same folk back home. Certainly something had been done after Brasidas' call for help the year before, but the three generals and the army dispatched were stopped in Thessaly on the orders of Perdiccas. But if those men's failure to press on through to where their numbers might make a difference was at the kings' door, for the next attempt there was less excuse. Another army of 900 hoplites was despatched about the time of the Amphipolis fight, but these men dawdled at Heraclea while their leader Ramphias indulged in some communal reorganisation and then turned back at the first sign of opposition by the Thessalians when they reached Pierium. There was something more basic here. Many in Laconia, while they had sanctioned the increased military investment in the north, were actually more and more determined on finding a peace formula; an arrangement that might both allow the prisoners at Athens to come home and the deconstruction of the Athenian posts around the Peloponnese that were looking like effective centres for fermenting helot revolt. Moreover, an end to their bloody

entanglement with the Athenians would free them up to deal with their bitter Peloponnesian rival Argos, now the end of the thirty years truce with that power was imminent. On top of this, what worried the Spartan establishment was the attitude Brasidas had shown when he had come close to defying the commissioner Aristonymus over Scione and Mende. Independent men in Chalcidice were anathema to many traditionalists who had, from the start, been disapproving of Brasidas' campaign of expansion, believing it was a distraction from direct attacks on Attica that were more likely to produce results.

So it was not a reinforced army eager to avenge the death of their old commander that imposed its grip even further on the key northern littoral. It was a rump which, with the rug whipped from under it, was finally able to achieve little more on its own behalf. At least the Spartans who remained in the north would have got some satisfaction from hearing of the reception when news of events at Amphipolis reached the homefolk. The occasion turned out to be an opportunity for some of that somewhat skewed mother love that Spartans were so famous for:

‘And when certain men from the scene of the battle arrived at Lacedaemon and brought the news of Brasidas’ victory as well as of his death, the mother of Brasidas, on learning of the course of the battle, inquired what sort of a man Brasidas had shown himself to be in the conflict. And when she was told that of all the Lacedaemonians he was the best, the mother of the dead man said, “My son Brasidas was a brave man, and yet he was inferior to many others.” When this reply passed throughout the city, the *ephors* accorded the woman public honours, because she placed the fair name of her country above the fame of her son.’<sup>11</sup>

Interestingly, if mothers showed extraordinary stoicism, in Sparta, with public displays of grief, it was the men who took the lead, and what wailing there was came from tenors rather than sopranos as it became known which other families in Laconia had lost members in the northern war.

## Epilogue

In 418 BC, several hundred soldiers, familiar veterans, marched out of the Eurotas valley, north over the mountains and down into the plain of Tripoli. With them tramped many others, all commanded by Agis one of the kings of Sparta. The campaign these men were on the way to was the climactic end of the second military expression of the long war between the two great leagues of Athens and Sparta that started in 431 BC and would last to 404 BC. The first part had come to a close very soon after the deaths of Brasidas and Cleon, and most considered it was their demise that was crucial in facilitating an end to that tenyear war. In the twelve months after the bloodbath at Amphipolis, a process had commenced akin to the one the women in Aristophanes' 'Lysistratus' compare to working with wool, with the skeins of material being intertwined like groups of envoys crisscrossing between belligerent cities to find a solution that all could agree on. Huddles of diplomats gathered from all over, dispatched to try and find a way in which the members of the two great Greek coalitions could solve their differences without more carnage.

In Athens, with Cleon gone, the key draughtsman of concord turned out to be the same Nicias who had been his steady rival during that dead man's period of ascendancy. This old political hand had been around a long time, and would have been well into his late fifties when he engineered the peace that would come to bear his name. He inherited a vast family fortune that came from slave-dug silver mines in the Laurium district, and it was sufficient almost to get him ostracised for just having so much more money than anybody else. His piety and ostentation were of epic proportions as it is claimed he brought a bridge of boats out to Delos so the performers he sent to compete there would arrive from an offshore island in pristine condition, rather than being unloaded chaotically on the beach. But his biographer is not a little ambivalent towards a character he seems to deride partly as a poor fish, very cautious, always worrying that if he took up a military command it might lead to disaster, rather than seeing it as an opportunity to glory. He was a man who could give up his command to a rival, and in the future, would allow a propensity to pious superstition to end in the killing fields of Syracuse. It seems he needed to buy the people's affection with spectacularly-funded musical and gymnastic shows rather than fine speaking or military achievement and, as the very pattern of the modern 'weasel'

politician, keeping his own public-relations consultant, a man called Hero. But if there was disapproval then there was also appreciation. He was reputed to be deeply honourable, his military achievements considerable and, prior to the end, largely successful.

However, in his Assembly record there is concern. One example of falling into a trap by trying to be too clever might be considered unfortunate but twice looks like incompetence. In the Pylos debate, to put him off from arguing for another expedition he suggests Cleon leads it himself, knowing that the old Assembly diva might be reluctant to try his reputation out in the field. But if he is not far off on gauging the man's reaction, out of a whole mess of bluff and counterbluff his rival ended up with a command that saw him borne home in triumph. And a few years later to try and forestall the decision to invade Sicily, in the guise of experienced military hand, he vastly upped the ante in his assessment of the number of ships and men needed to carry it out. The intention was to put the people off by showing how costly an enterprise it would be, but all it achieved was to get it agreed that an even larger armament be dispatched than Alcibiades, the proposer of the enterprise, was asking for in the first place. That Nicias was also given shared command in the enterprise did not please him much either, even if he had no inkling of how fatal it would end for him.

He had never been a hard war man, and his good personal relations with many Spartans gelled well with people in Athens who wanted a compromise peace consistent with patriotism. The two deaths at Amphipolis helped in a change of atmosphere in which these moderates in Attica could envisage a meeting of minds with their equivalents in Laconia. The context was always those prisoners festering in confinement at Athens, whose shields decorated the temples around the city. The desire to free them created a new-found reasonableness in the council halls of Sparta. The political elite there were not of a kind to find the victory at Amphipolis sufficiently heady wine to blind them to the fact that her central strategy was largely failing, to either bring her enemy out to Armageddon battle or to her knees through the harrying of her agricultural lands. On top of this, they worried about Argos; the long truce between the two Peloponnesian powers was coming to an end, and the Argives would not renew it unless the Spartans returned a long stretch of coastal country called Cynuria that they were unprepared to let go off. So Sparta pushed the talking, and in King Pleistoanax, an offspring of

Pausanias the victor of Plataea, they had a chief negotiator who had good cause to hope for quiet times. He had skeletons in his ample cupboard involving sacrilegious attempts to bribe the prophetess at Delphi, and he fretted that his domestic enemies might raise these matters as part cause of any troubles that Sparta would encounter in a continued and unpredictable war.

As for the Athenians, two defeats at Delium and Amphipolis had knocked their confidence and fear of more members of her league falling away was rife. A whole winter of squabbling in 422 BC occupied the envoys from all the interested parties, but it seems the trigger was a threat by the Spartans to set up a stronghold in Attica to match Pylos in the Peloponnese, where the Messenian allies of Athens were still well dug in. For the Athenians, there had always been concern that a peace around the status quo would profit them little, because a reinvigorated enemy could always come at them in a few years' time. But now this, the direct threat of enemy troops keeping them permanently off their farms and completely denying access to the key Laurium silver load, was enough to make them see reason. But if they were able to keep their own side tight, Sparta had much greater difficulties with her cohorts. Many were happy to get on board and to swear to the terms on offer, but far from all, and those jumping ship were some of the most important, like Corinth, Boeotia, Elis and Megara. Yet even this did not stop the Spartans from pushing ahead.

In the spring of 421 BC, a treaty, of which the text is extant, was sworn to by the combatants of the ten-year war. The agreement saw each side returning what they had won, though with plenty of convenient silences about places like Plataea and Acarnania. The Spartans seemed to ditch their interests in the north that Brasidas had struggled so hard for; the details were left in the air with assurances about places being allowed to be neutral and autonomous provided they paid the tribute 'as assessed by Aristides'. The two kings of Sparta, Ischagoras, who had experience in Thrace, and Brasidas' father Tellis and, for Athens, Nicias, Hagnon, and Demosthenes amongst a number of others were there to swear the oaths on this peace, even though much in the detail meant that implementing it might be more difficult than signing it. It was particularly a bigger contextual issue that stirred up so many; the Spartan and Athenian big shots who put their names to it had also agreed a defensive alliance, that included not only a clause for Athens to help put down troublesome helots but also committed Sparta to going to the assistance of Athens, even

against people who in the past had been part of the Peloponnesian League. This deeply worried many who had territorial wrangles with the Attic city and were concerned they had not only got little out of a war to which they had contributed so much but now might find themselves being forced to disgorge anything they had gained by a combination of Athenian and Spartan spears. The Corinthians were so unhappy that they did not even go home from the final conference in the Eurotas valley, but went straight to Argos appealing for support from this alternative focus of power. This peninsular rival would become central to the story in the next few years, and the Corinthians found in her an eager listener. Soon, others adhered as well, like the Mantineans, who had been strengthening their position in Arcadia and were now afraid the Spartans would try and reduce their influence; others like Elis, angry over Spartan interference on her southern borderlands, joined in too.

The threat of a new Sparta-Athens axis produced great fissures in what had been old Peloponnesian certainties. Implementation of the peace was fraught with difficulties; the Spartans could not get the Corinthians and Boeotians to agree to give back what they had captured from Athens. And in Thrace the Athenians captured Scione, killing the men, enslaving the rest and replanting the place with displaced friends from Plataea. At crucial Amphipolis the people would not return to the Delian fold, and the Spartans could not or would not make them. Equally, the Athenians, if they sent back the prisoners, still had not evacuated Pylos. A diplomatic cotillion between Corinth, Boeotia, Argos and Sparta now progressed in a hugely convoluted but largely abortive way, with only more tension to show for it. The Spartans were cack-handed too; they showed how justifiable Mantinea's fears were when in summer 421 BC King Pleistoanax invaded Arcadia, destroying strongpoints, and forcing the citizens to bring in an Argive garrison to defend their city walls. This peace was a brittle thing, and its collapse was forced along by a character with an extraordinary career in front of him, though already slightly noticed at Potidaea. Alcibiades was a scion of an amazing clan who, led by Pericles, dominated the democratic city of Athens for decades. Like ancient Kennedys they exuded glamour, and with plenty of money they were a centre of power and cultural life. Undeniably talented, a libertine, revelling in power without responsibility, this friend of philosophers and whores excelled in every sphere he entered, even splashing out enough to win first and third places at the chariot race in the Olympic Games. This man who would cook up the coming



conflagration, though very different from Cleon, was in one way his heir. He too was a darling of the people, who could mould the emotions of the Assembly, in a way the likes of Nicias found it difficult to do. It is suggested that resentment at not being included in negotiating the peace in 421 BC was behind his looking for a way to undermine it but this is trying to look too hard. He was always waiting for an opportunity to make his mark, and saw this now that many of Sparta's allies, who had paid and bled in the war, were not at all happy with the outcome. He recognised that Corinth, Mantinea and Elis, who had made friends with Argos, might, with Athenian backing, be prepared to challenge the hegemony of their old leader.

The timing also seemed right; the Spartan name did not seem to carry its old clout. Elis had shown them no respect at the 420 BC Olympic Games, denying her involvement then publicly beating a Spartan man who transgressed the ruling, and, as significantly, they had lost control of the colony at Heraclea in central Greece, the garrison being defeated by its neighbours and the Boeotians taking over the town. With Sparta in this battered condition, two old enemies determined to make hay: Alcibiades had persuaded his fellow citizens to join with the Argives to take charge in a region where both powers had long held ambitions. The key was Epidaurus, and people technically at peace were getting sucked into action. Alcibiades came to help with 1,000 men, though when he arrived the fighting was over. This was pretty minor stuff, and it soon fizzled out but there could be little doubt there were now people looking to Argos as a potential new peninsular leader, while the Athenian adventurer stirred up a conflagration, though he would not himself be present at the battle that was its culmination. Similarly, in a few years' time, though the moving force in the attack on Syracuse, again he would not be there to see it through to its disastrous end.

By the time the two sides came to battle in 418 BC, the anti-Spartan coalition had made considerable inroads, having taken Arcadian Orchomenus, and were concentrating their forces at Mantinea and looking all set to march south on Tegea. The pro Spartans at that place had sent dire warnings that the locals too might join their growing list of enemies if they did not do something quick. So it was fear that insured that Sparta came in all her military panoply, even though her situation had improved since straight after the Peace of Nicias. The Corinthians, Megara and the Boeotians were back on side and mobilised for a second year in support. Equally,

stalwarts from the likes of Sicyon and Phlius, who we never hear of wavering in their loyalty, were gathering ready to march south against the Argive, Athenian, Elian and Mantinean confederates. As important, divisions in Spartan ranks had been ameliorated when the Sphacteria prisoners, given a hard time on their return, were reintegrated into the citizen body, and again could be expected to be strong soldiers in the cause. So Sparta, for the first time in a very long while challenged near home soil, was able to pull out all the stops.

Every age class was mobilised including specialist regiments, like the Sciritae, a highland regiment of free but non Spartiates recruited from north Laconia who traditionally held the left of the battle line but also acted as scouts and camp guards, the Neodamodeis and the Brasidaeioi. These last were Brasidas' old helot hoplites. Since his death much had happened to them; at first they remained at Amphipolis before shipping back to Sparta under Clearidas. Once home, he did right by the men who had done so well for Brasidas; they were freed and allowed to settle where they wanted. Many went to Lepreum on the border of Elis where other freed helots, the Neodamodeis, had already been planted. Now, emancipated helots, Spartiates and other peninsular warriors would stand shoulder to shoulder. Interestingly, though, there is no mention of Perioci troops although the details are fulsome about most of those assembled. It is possible these were either slower to mobilise, which is suggested during the Pylos campaign, or not completely trusted when it came to fighting Peloponnesian neighbours.

The man in command was Agis, who had come to the throne in 427 BC. His had been a limited role, largely just ravaging the fields of Attica; once he was thoroughly put off by earthquakes and on another occasion only stayed fifteen days before being called back by the events at Pylos. He was now under a cloud for having, earlier in the year, made a truce with the Argives when he had been well positioned to crush them in battle. This occurred after a swirl of combat where the Spartans faced the confederate army in the hills and plains round Phlius and Nemea. At home, they were incensed by what was seen as cowardice, and he was brought before judges, whose first inclination was to raze his house and fine him 10,000 drachmas. But the king must have had his reasons for what he did, and managed to get some of this across to his accusers, who agreed to commute his sentence and allow him to continue in command 'and atone for his fault by good service in the field'. But there was a sting in the tale that he must take

a group of ten Spartiates with him as a council, whose permission he must get to lead the army out to fight. As it turned out, though, the Spartans were not the only ones dissatisfied with the truce where they were sure victory had been possible. The Argives, too, punished their commander when he got home, stoning him almost to death in a dry watercourse running outside the city walls. This was looking on both sides something like an Admiral Byng principle 2,000 years before its time. The communities to which these two belonged wholeheartedly endorsed what is famously proposed by Voltaire in reference to eighteenth-century Great Britain:

‘In this country, it is wise to kill an admiral from time to time to encourage the others.’

So it was this slightly shop-soiled and a necessarily part-hamstrung Spartan king who marched his army down to the Arcadian border at Orestheion, to call up their allies from the Arcadian league. Then, after assuring themselves that Tegea was still loyal, the older soldiers and the young men, a sixth of the army, were sent back for home defence. It was ten-plus miles to Mantinea up the figure of eight plain of Tripoli, where, looking down from the conical hill from the north end, the town itself is clear in outline and the later circular walls readily visible. South, over two miles below, two spurs of land come in from right and left making a narrow waist where a copse of oak trees called Pelages covered the west side before the plain spreads out wider down to Tegea. Stretching east down past Mantinea town was a hill called the Alesion dominating 600-odd feet above the level of the plain. This was a much-fought-over area; apart from 418 BC, the year 362 BC saw another battle where the great Theban Epaminondas died in victory against another Spartan army. Then in 307 BC a Spartan tyrant called Machanidas was defeated and killed in battle against an Achaean-League army led by Philopoemen, ‘the last of the Greeks’.<sup>1</sup>

Once in the fertile fields near the town, the invaders wrecked everything they could reach, while a camp was made at a shrine to Heracles, off to the south, left of the Tegea to Mantinea road. From there, the Spartans could see the enemy was not prepared to be quiescent; they were seen marching in very confident fashion down from their strong position on the slopes of the Alesion heights. Agis wanted to lead his men to the attack. Indeed they were within a javelin’s throw of the confederate line when, what is described as one of the older men, chided him that he was putting his men in danger by attacking in this place; that the king’s motivation was only to recoup

his tarnished reputation at the risk of defeat. Who this man was is not known, but as no chorus of dissent is suggested, perhaps he was one of the commission of ten articulating the opinions of this decisive group; that it was better to wait for their Corinthian and Boeotian friends and the rest who were known to be on the way from the north. Whether it was a commissar's veto, or a corporate failure of nerve, the result was again that the Spartan king pulled back from the edge of battle and faded back towards the safety of the border with Tegea.

But this turned out not cowardice but tactics; as, once pulled back, Agis got his men digging, to divert a watercourse so it threatened to flood the low-lying agricultural lands around Mantinea. It is probable the country was less dry then than at the present time. Pausanias mentions a skirt of timber, thirsty oaks that do not exist today, and indeed marshes are mentioned even in the summer in the late nineteenth century. To make a water war in modern conditions, in what was possibly August, would be very difficult indeed, but on this occasion it worked. The Argives, Arcadians and Athenians, after getting over their surprise at the Spartans' withdrawal, saw what their plan was and that the event demanded action. Scouts peering across the plain saw the ruinous intention of the invaders, and, on being informed, the men demanded to be led down from the heights so they could base themselves nearby and be ready to attack the next day. At dawn they deployed for a fight, marching towards the enemy still breakfasting at their old camp by the shrine to Heracles.

Agis saw them in the distance, the sun twinkling on armoured ranks, which is reported as a complete surprise to the Spartans, the like of which could not be remembered. Whether their coming had been obscured by the spur of a hill, by the wood, or just a failure to keep a look out is not clear. And neither did it seem to have any great impact. Agis may have had to hurry to get his men properly ordered and underway, but the routine of deploying was accomplished without difficulty as orders went down the officer pyramid, that was so much the strength of the Spartan army. Their phalanx was pretty homogenous, with the greatest number being one sort of Laconian or another. The left was held as was traditional by the 600 Sciritae, then came the *Brasidaeioi*, the men who remained with the regiment since their commander's death. The effects of attrition in the northern wars must have reduced their original total but still they were present in significant numbers. Alongside them were the *neodamodeis*, other freed helots required to do military service for the land given them

near Lepreon, planted as a regional break on Elis' local ambitions. There were 512 of them all told, though some argue double the number.<sup>2</sup> The relationship of these veterans was no longer master and servitor, though likely there were differences to be seen between the Spartiates on their right who would have been better armed, apart from Brasidas' veterans who might have plundered some good battle gear in the old war. The over 6,000 Spartiates were probably organized in six regiments of two *lochoi* each, and at their head Agis, protected by 300 elite knights in the centre, the very best infantry even if their name harked back to pre Lysurgus days when Sparta was run by a horse-riding landed elite. Along the line after came a unit of Arcadians, then a sizable force from Tegea, and on the extreme right, a small number of Spartans. For this army, of what might have been between 10,000 and 11,000 hoplites, we are specifically told there were cavalry flank guards on both sides.

They could see the confederates now drawn up across the rolling plain. From the right were posted the men from Mantinea, fighting on home soil, and holding the place of honour. After them came Arcadians and 1,000 picked Argives, who, like the men who had fought with Brasidas, were case-hardened veterans, likely to give a very good account of themselves. This group were a bit of an experiment, a body of citizens dedicated to war in an almost Spartan way; they were sustained at public expense and dedicated themselves entirely to military exercise and training. The rest of the Argive levy then held the centre, with friends from other communities of the Agolid, and on the left were the Athenians, who we know had their own cavalry deployed to protect their flank. The numbers are difficult, but on home soil the Mantineans must have been present in good force; the Argives as well, being Sparta haters with so much to pay back. It seems likely that the confederates were not outnumbered by much; when the two armies came to blows it was no numerical mismatch.

Before battle joined there was concern in Agis' headquarters that if he did not take action the left of his line would be overlapped by the Mantineans opposite. This was because of the natural tendency of hoplite phalanxes to shift to the right as each soldier searched for greater cover from the shield of his right-side neighbour. This propensity might be coped with in a number of ways. It was possible to go with the flow and hope the advantage gained by the right wing would compensate for the disadvantage experienced on the left. Or,

alternatively, units within the line might be adjusted to obviate the difficulty. It was the second Agis now attempted; to ensure there was no dangerous overlap he ordered his men on the left, the Sciritae and the helot soldiers, to shuffle over and make certain they kept even with the Mantineans opposite them. They must have been dependable men, these freed servitors, to be given the task of halting the pitch to the right that even the very best Spartan soldiers were subject to. The problem was that Agis, knowing his Spartans and Tegeans could not be kept from the lurching over, would understand that a gap was bound to develop between those holding firm on the left and those on their other side.

But Agis had a plan. To plug this hole he ordered the *polemarchs* Hipponoidas and Aristocles to take two *lochoi* to fill the gap. What would have been done to cover the place they originally held we are not told but presumably the right side of the whole phalanx would have to be re-adjusted. As it turned out, this plan was never tested; they refused to obey the order and stayed put in the line. The reason for this disobedience is undisclosed, though they would suffer exile for it. This was almost unheard-of behaviour; most would have had to dredge their memories back to the battle of Plataea in 479 BC to think of another instance. Then an officer called Amompharetus refused to retreat when his commander was trying to withdraw his whole force to a safer position. His training had drilled in the message that a warrior never leaves his place in the line, and on that occasion, and now this one, this compunction could even trump that other imperative to obey orders. Though what should not be forgotten was that Agis at Mantinea and Pausanias at Plataea were leaders under a cloud who did not carry the clout of most army commanders.

With voices raised in anger, there was no smooth execution of the demanded manoeuvre, only the cursing of a king whose reputation was broken on the wheel of his previous failure. But the malfunction in command could not slow the inevitable rhythm of battle as the line moved ponderously forward to the sound of pipes, while the confederates came on with a great deal more noise and fury in a jostling pack. The Mantinean warriors on the right front were confident and determined as they approached the Sciritae, an attitude only reinforced by the nervousness of defenders aware of the unfilled gap further over on their right. With the two lines of durable warriors closing, the effect of the *polemarchs'* disobedience was going to be hard felt. They came in against first the Sciritae, then Brasidas' old

guard felt the impact. Eight or so deep, these men on the left side of the phalanx saw soldiers from Mantinea, who they had known for years as allies, advancing against them. They might have seen the faces of men they have once fought alongside sweating under bronze helmets and hunkering down behind their shields. The defenders' own panoplies gave some protection against men crowding in and stabbing with stout iron tipped spears, but their right being in the air was fatal. So even these soldiers of high repute failed, not even the best could survive such an onset when they knew they were outflanked.

After these opponents had faded back in rout, the Mantineans pushed on and found the rest of the freed helots who had fought so hard for Brasidas and the Neodamodeis. They were not only taken in the front, but from the flank where the Sciritae had withdrawn, and on the other side where the failure of Hipponoidas and Aristocles had left them exposed. The famous band of 1,000 brazen Argives, joining with the left of the Mantineans, came rushing towards the gap against men exposed with no shield to protect them. They had shown for years under Brasidas what they could do; they had never experienced defeat in battle but now it was different. No hoplite was designed for this, and they had no answer to the stabbing spears and slashing swords of men who hated Lacedaemons with a vengeance, making no differentiation between full Spartiates or ex helots fighting beside them. It had been brands borne by just such servile men that over seventy years before had set fire to the orchard where 6,000 Argive heroes had been burned to death after the battle of Sepeia. The phalanx was all about mutual protection, and now with a boiling enemy enveloping them on the flank and the Argives arriving out of the dust where the Spartan *lochoi* should have been, little could be hoped for. These veterans bent, then broke; pushed back they tried to retreat in order, but with the enemy in behind they fell apart, the last hurrah of Brasidas' regiment ended in calamity.

The 1,000 Argives about 125 shields across rived the enemy line, pushing broken, butchered men back to the camp they had left with such optimism in the morning. There, with the Mantineans, they fell upon defeated men looking for respite among the wagons and the older men left on guard. Now the remnants looked to avoid a rampant foe, utterly convinced that they had lost the day. But in fact the defeated men comprised less than a quarter of Agis' army, and with the remainder that king was about to turn the direction of events around. Settled in the centre of the Spartan regiments, Agis and his

300, like the rest of the army, had advanced slowly in time to flute players, keeping well ordered and in formation. For the enemy, as they rolled down through the dust, it was very different, coming on 'with haste and fury', prepared to allow their dressing to suffer for the sake of impact. It is doubtful that Agis realised his left flank had dissolved, and even if he did it hardly mattered; what was needed now was the warrior not the commander, that would come later. The confederates were noisy combatants with the human voice backed by the blaring of the *salpinx*, the public rooster. But it was bravado; it did not indicate much real confidence for 'haste and fury' turned out to be piss and wind as the older class of Argives, the soldiers from Cleonae, and Orneaea, collapsed on contact, and ran with those in the front trodden under by the onrushing enemy ranks.

This rendered the Athenian position untenable. Not only were they outflanked on their left by the small Lacedaemon unit and the right of the Tegeans who had by the shift to the right gone beyond them, but now with their allies driven from their right, they were exposed there too; 'between two fires' these men did not have quite the quality of the Sciritae and the Brasideioi, so with enemy howling on their flanks, and fearsome Spartiates showing their Lambda-emblazoned shields on their front, they too failed to hold. Some fought because they could not flee, while others were crushed under foot by friends and foe alike. Organized resistance did not last long, and it would have gone very hard for the Athenians and their allies except for two circumstances. The first was that the cavalry covering their wing at least did part of their job. If they could not stop the outflanking they threatened the Tegeans and Spartans sufficiently by their presence, riding and hurling javelins, so that many of their footslogging comrades were able to make a successful escape. But this was not the only reason; the other was that Agis had transmogrified from Achilles to Odysseus. The battling hoplite king began to realise what had happened on his own left, and had, of necessity, changed into a commander-in-chief.

He pulled up as many of his chasing men as he could, the presence of the enemy cavalry making obedience an attractive alternative to many who otherwise might have been tempted by the backs of their running foes. Most of the Tegeans and his dependable Spartiates were bullied into their ranks and wheeled ninety degrees so they were facing what had been their left, and where the position was gradually becoming clearer. The Mantineans and Argives were swarming over



the Peloponnesian camp in search of anything of value but gradually they began to see that they may have got the better of the men in front of them. But elsewhere the battle had been very different. And now through the afternoon dust they were able to make out a line of enemies coming towards them. These spearmen were unmistakable with their blood-red tunics, long plaited hair and beards, and, distracted by loot and disorganized in victory, they were not in the best condition to receive this kind of attack. In this last gasp the confederates hardly put up any fight as they pulled out of the camp. The Mantineans lost heavily, fleeing across the head of the approaching enemy, but the Argive elite troops much less so. We are not told, but with their corps cohesion they would have kept together better, to fend off pursuit; though at least one later authority<sup>3</sup> claims a man named Pharax persuaded Agis to let the Argives escape without trying to hurt them at all.

This bloody postscript near the camp was of mercifully short duration, and after the defeated army escaped and a headcount was made, they found they had lost 700 out of the Argives, Ornetae and Cleonae, 200 Mantineans. Some 200 more Athenians and Aiginetans also fell, and with them two generals. On Agis' side 300 casualties are reported, and of these Brasidas' old legion would have provided a fair proportion after the impossible had been asked of them when their flank was left exposed. Tactically decisive but strategically not so, is an accurate verdict on this, one of the great phalanx encounters of the long war. Soon after the battle, the coalition exploited typical Spartan piety, celebrating the Carneia festival, to bring in more men from Athens, Elis and Argos to fill their ranks. That allowed them to take up the cudgel against Epidaurus, with the Athenians digging in close to the city, and the old riff of oligarch against democrat stasis became a dominant theme, Alcibiades and his Athenians backed democrats in the streets of Argos, while Spartan troops forced an elite government on a previously democratic ally, Sicyon. The Athenians also helped their new Argive comrades to start some long walls to the sea that would allow them to defy Sparta in the way hers to Piraeus had done; all the while delegates from many of the powers kept a frenzy of negotiating going on. But one important change there had been. The Spartan reputation, much dented since Pylos, had been mightily refurbished, and this mattered in peninsular politics, particularly as it would not be long before the great war itself ignited again.

This regiment that had been so effective bustling north in

Chalcidice, Thrace and Lyncestis was not heard of as the Brasideioi anymore after the battle of Mantinea, but the troop type itself was far from obsolete. Helots recruited to fight as hoplite infantry would pop up, and some may have been the same individuals who had hefted a shield in the ranks behind Brasidas. They will be noticed in the force that King Agis used to fortify Decelea in Attica in 413 BC. They fought in Sicily and Euboea in the same year, and were used as oarsmen in the later part of the war, while in another conflict they went to Asia under a commander called Thibron and King Agesilaus, returning with him to fight at Coronae in 394 BC. Such liberated men also fought around Olynthus again in the 380s, and in those failed campaigns where they attempted to impose Spartan hegemony over Greece that in the end resulted in Theban invasions of the Peloponnese and ultimately brought about the liberation of Messene in the 360s. Much later, in the 320s, there was an institutionalisation of the trend, as home-grown helots from Laconia benefited when King Cleomenes III, to pump up a military that had become paper thin, reformed it, allowing helots who had the money to buy up lots of land that brought with it the status, entitlements and military responsibilities of full Spartans.

The finale the original emancipated helots had played out with Brasidas against Cleon's army at Amphipolis had been pretty unique, an encounter where the commander-in-chief on both sides perished in the fighting. It is necessary to run down twenty centuries and climb the heights of Abraham near Quebec in 1759 AD to find a parallel, when Wolf and Montcalm were killed at the head of their respective armies. The names of both the Spartan and the Athenian involved would crop up in the future in drama, history, poetry and even philosophy, despite the question might be legitimately asked what had they done to greatly affect the development of the world they exited in 422 BC. Certainly Brasidas' reputation in his home town was highlighted when, a few centuries later, Pausanias tells us he had seen his monument, albeit empty, west of the marketplace in Sparta adjacent to perhaps the greatest local name of all, Leonidas. And he remained high on the list of cunning strategists advertised by the likes of Frontinus and Polyaeus; remembered for a somewhat odd story about throwing the key to a city's gates over the wall so the defenders could not let the enemy in, for tricks like setting fire to the country in a defile behind him to secure the rear of his army on the march, and in battle allowing his enemy to surround him, in one version even by a wall, so their ranks might become so thinned that he was able to

punch through them with his own small force.

The Spartan establishment were not always happy with the man, despite his time as *ephor* and at the centre of the military. The hints are strong of jealousy over his success in the north. He was the kind of uncomfortable maverick Sparta, every so often, produced, and if he had an heir it was perhaps Lysander, another very un-Laconian operator who could snuggle up to Persian exquisites and Asian Greek elites to benefit his country's war effort, just as Brasidas is reported doing with the people at Scione, Mende or Acanthus. But it must always be remembered that our main source has an agenda. This general was the man who bested him at Amphipolis so it was required that he be a very special Spartan indeed. The burnishing of his reputation is quite unusual in 'The Peloponnesian War'; the author is not afraid to give him an epic dimension, the loss of his shield at Pylos is Homeric and the reporting of his funeral games mentioned at Amphipolis very atypical indeed. There is a highlighting of qualities that was also useful to point out the stolidity and lack of imagination that Thucydides saw at the root of most other Spartans' characters.

Yet if for Brasidas the mood music is grandiose then for Cleon it is not at all the same. He is held up to exemplify a poverty of leadership amongst the Athenians that set in once Pericles was no more; that saw the advent of bloviating, irresponsible men. This despite the fact there are concrete arguments that can be made that Cleon should be lauded. The Peace of Nicias made after his death would not have been half as advantageous, even possible, without his triumph at Pylos. And there had been something even more enduring, his undermining of the reputation of the Spartiates as a kind of superman. Superman cannot surrender, but those on Sphacteria had done to Cleon, and if this did not stop Sparta from heading into a generation of military dominance, it was always a fragile hegemony. The lack of solidity was partly because of this loss of kudos as well as more systemic problems of a failure to reproduce their military population.

The problem for Thucydides is that Cleon is anathema; perhaps understandable if the latter orchestrated the former's exile after his failure at Amphipolis; he was, after all, the dominant figure in the Assembly and courts at that time. It was also snobbery and faction bile too against a man who the historian derides as a crude populist. There was plenty of animus from others too, who hated Cleon partly out of snootiness against new money and partly because of the extra war taxes he made them pay to fund Athen's triremes and soldiers. There

are hints that Cleon was a real fiscal reformer who, holding high positions in the treasury, introduced a property tax for military purposes. This probably goes far to explaining the vitriol the well-heeled directed at his name. The old elite deeply resented both having to accept equality in the Assembly he dominated, and his influence in the courts that held them to account when they reported back at the end of any tenure in office. They retaliated, though, by making sure that in the theatre it was their voice that shouted the loudest; by funding comic productions they could ensure Cleon and his like were lampooned. To ensure nothing was lost, the humour was broad and unsubtle, with many actors wearing masks bearing the recognisable features of their targets. Not that even the stage showed a monolithic profile; plenty of people took the other side in a squabble between war hero and the comic playwright Aristophanes. Support for the former was enough, on one occasion, to ensure nobody would make a mask to represent Cleon for a production of 'The Knights' but equally sufficient on the other side to ensure Aristophanes won first prize for the performance in question. Yet with this dramatist, even if he accepted largesse from old money, his targets remained very much his own. He even derided Socrates as a huckster and con man in 'The Clouds', one of his hit performances in those dramatic festivals that had become one of the keystones of civic life by the fifth century, with panels judging and prestigious prizes being awarded. And frequently he took it out on young men who were the offspring of his patrons. In pouring scorn on young rich exquisites who left the fighting to the poor sailor and soldier, he was aiming for those who are the butt of satire in any age, and Aristophanes has no more of a direct party agenda than much satire in our own day. He has a tone, but for the rest he would get a laugh where he could, as contradictory as, say, 'Private Eye', a publication that reeks of the snobbery of the public-school common room despite how radical some of its contributors have been.

How Cleon would have been remembered by his old audience in the Assembly is difficult to know though. There would certainly have been memories of good humour. We know of one occasion, apparently not untypical, when the audience took his vainglory in very good part: 'It is said, for instance, that once when the assembly was in session, the people sat out on the Pnyx a long while waiting for him to address them, and that late in the day he came in all garlanded for dinner and asked them to adjourn the assembly to the morrow. "I'm busy today"

he said, "I'm going to entertain some guests, and have already sacrificed to the gods." The Athenians burst out laughing, then rose up and dissolved the assembly.<sup>74</sup>

But there is no record of him being recognised in the sort of monuments built for heroes like Phormio, and no bust is claimed as portraying him despite an argument that this consummate Assembly man had fared pretty well when initially he took up the sword. Clearly, Pylos was a great achievement, and there were others for which he did not always get his due. Certainly the recapture of Torone had been a triumph; his strategy before the battle by Amphipolis was sound enough and some evidence certainly suggests that before his death he had made great strides in re-establishing the Athenian position in much of the Chalcidice. The extent of his success depends on how much faith is placed in inscriptional evidence relating to tribute payments where the chronology is misty and there is no real way of being sure of what and when places returned to the Delian fold. Yet, whatever his impact before the final fight, the Amphipolis disaster has been indelibly imprinted as being the result of his incompetence and cowardice. Still, in the fullness of time, this man was probably remembered by many Athenians with some positivity as part of a sort of springtime of the war. Despite the plague, the countryside being annually ravaged and defeats like Delium and Amphipolis there had been plenty of triumphs as well, a chiaroscuro time but one surely appreciated in hindsight after the experience of a long dark winter, commencing with catastrophe at Syracuse, and culminating with apocalypse at Aegospotami.

Most of the key players involved with Cleon and Brasidas did not outlive them long. Phormio is not heard of after 429 BC, presumably dying or too old for service after that, and Alcidas is not noticed again after his colonial adventure at Heraclea. King Archidamus died some time near 427 BC while two of his sons would follow him onto the throne; Agis in 426 BC and Agesilaus, a generation later, who though not expected to reign at all became one of Sparta's greatest warrior kings. Of Clearidas' future career little is known, only that like his old commander he could be difficult to handle for the folks back home. He refused to hand over Amphipolis to Athens when a commission from Sparta demanded this be implemented as part of the peace. He returned home to appeal the matter but even after this still refused the order, returning to Sparta in summer 421 BC with Brasidas' old army to avoid handing the place over. We do not hear from him after this

despite a possibility that he could have been Thucydides' informant for much that had gone on in Thrace before and after Brasidas' death, something suggested by an unusual amount of detail on motivation, and the interesting point that Clearidas is the only officer ever actually named in any of Thucydides' pre-battle addresses.<sup>5</sup>

As for the others, Perdiccas continued slippery, joining one side and then the other and by 417 BC adhering to a Spartan Argive combination that came into being soon after the battle at Mantinea. But by 415 BC an inscription found at Athens shows they were back on good terms, and, indeed, in 414 BC he marched with an Athenian general, Euetion, and plenty of locally-recruited Thracians as part of an ongoing campaign to retake control of Amphipolis. This was a heavyweight effort, and, though the army failed to accomplish a takeover, the fleet accompanying them set up a blockade at the mouth of the Strymon. But by 413 BC Perdiccas was dead, leaving Macedonia to his son Archelaus. As for the Thracians, Sitalces had died in 424 BC in a spat with the neighbouring Triballi, and his nephew Seuthes, already an important man in the country, took over the throne, lasting until 410 BC during which time he distanced himself from Athens far more than his predecessor. As for those entangled with Cleon, whether assembly supporters or rivals, military colleagues or competitors, most of them like Nicias, Demosthenes and Lachares would end their careers and lives on the island of Sicily in just a few years' time.

The region that saw the double deaths of Brasidas and Cleon was also in for an eventful time in the next century and a half. A Spartan king would fight and die up there in forty years' time,<sup>6</sup> while Olynthus would become the head of a Chalcidian league, set up principally to keep the Athenians from restabilising their hold in the north; a local conglomerate that a few decades later was itself subsumed in a greater Macedonia under Phillip II. He was a king who, by exploiting the natural resources of the Strymon valley, Mount Pangaion and further east into the Thrace as well as the human resources of the highland cantons of Upper Macedonia, created a hegemonic power in all of mainland Greece. This was a polity that, when inherited by his son Alexander, and seconded by a league of Greek states, had the military muscle to conquer virtually the whole of the known world in a scant eleven years. This made that man who followed onto the throne of Perdiccas a titan of occidental history, with no real peers, ensuring the necessity to head east to find his like, in perhaps Genghis Khan or Qin Shi Huang, the first emperor of China.

THE END

# Notes

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3. Pausanias, *Description of Greece*, Book 1 chap 23



4. Hale, John R, *Lords of the Sea*, Publisher: Gibson Square Books
5. Diodorus Siculus, *Universal History*, 12

#### **Chapter 4: Conflict in Corcyra**

1. Gylippus, the man who was key to the defense of Syracuse against the Athenians in the siege of 415–13 BC but after the end of the war was found with some of the loot Lysander had sent with him back to Sparta.

2. Diodorus Siculus, *Universal History*, 12

#### **Chapter 5: An Island at the Centre**

1. Diodorus Siculus, *Universal History*, 12
2. Ibid
3. Homer, *Iliad* 21 . 388
4. Diodorus Siculus, *Universal History*, 12

#### **Chapter 6: Cleon and Victory**

1. Plutarch, *Pericles*, 33
2. Ibid 35
3. Aristophanes, *The Knights*
4. Aristotle, *The Athenian Constitution*, section 28
5. Diodorus Siculus, *Universal History*, 12
6. Ibid
7. Ibid
8. Aristophanes, *The Knights*

#### **Chapter 7: A Distraction then a Start**

1. Aristotle, *The Politics*, Book V
2. Aristophanes, *The Peace*
3. Diodorus Siculus, *Universal History*, 12
4. Pausanias, *Description of Greece*, Book 1 chap 44
5. Aristophanes, *The Acharnians*

#### **Chapter 8: Up North**

1. Herodotus, *The Histories*, Book 8
2. Plato, *The Symposium*

#### **Chapter 9: Winter War**

1. Diodorus Siculus, *Universal History*, 12
2. Pritchett, W Kendrick, The Bridge over the Strymon: A Correction, *American Journal of Archaeology* Vol. 75, No. 1 (Jan.,

1971), p. 92

3. Diodorus Siculus, *Universal History*, 12

4. Pausanias, *Description of Greece*, Book 10 chap 19

5. A number of these maritime itineraries are known from as early as the sixth century BC, and a fourth-century example, the *Periplus of Pseudo-Scylax*, mentions the Illyrians .

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8. Diodorus Siculus, *Universal History*, 12

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11. Diodorus Siculus, *Universal History*, 12

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4. Plutarch, *Nicias*, 7

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